

# A Vineyard Story

Estelle Wright

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"Janey Warren paused at the gate to look at the scene as she had done a hundred times since her return in May."

(Frontispiece—see page 20.)



# A Vineyard Story

By Estella Wight

*A Sequel to "In the Shelter of the Little Brown  
Cottage"*



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Dedicated

to

The Young Men and Maidens  
to whom the call of the Master  
comes ringing down through the ages,  
"Go work in my vineyard

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## CONTENTS

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. The Blackberry Patch .....	9
2. The Glen .....	20
3. A Strong Cord .....	32
4. Here and There .....	40
5. A New Friendship .....	47
6. The Challenge .....	56
7. "We Are Brothers" .....	68
8. A Letter of Introduction .....	78
9. An Enemy in Camp .....	86
10. A Sudden Change of Temperature .....	96
11. The Skating Party .....	103
12. The Debate .....	111
13. A Cloud in the June Time Sky .....	118
14. "A Fool in the Forest" .....	128
15. The Battle Under the Stars .....	143
16. "The Foolishness of Preaching" .....	157
17. "Lo, I Am with You Always" .....	173
18. The Camp at Timber Lake .....	181
19. Eyes, Ears, Knot Holes, and Crevices .....	189
20. An Informal Announcement .....	217
21. "According As It Is Written" .....	225
22. In Sheep's Clothing .....	234
23. Pussy Willows .....	245
24. A Day of Compensations .....	256
25. "Whither Thou Goest" .....	261
26. An Unlucky Horseshoe .....	269
27. The Straight Furrow .....	276

28. Wild Roses and Forget-me-nots .....	287
29. From Near and Far .....	296
30. "Only a Plodder" .....	309
31. The New Bakery .....	324
32. Commencement Day .....	329
33. The Path of His Choosing .....	337
34. "A Mere Matter of Sentiment" .....	350
35. The Cremation of Cleopatra .....	359
36. The Richer Meed .....	367
37. "Erodelphians" .....	373
38. "How Blessed Are They Who Have Labored Diligently in His Vineyard" .....	380

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece: Janey Warren paused at the gate to look at the scene as she had done a hundred times since her return home in May.

"It's all right, son," the older man spoke, finally, laying his coarse, toil-hardened hand on the strong young shoulder. . . . "It's all right. . . . I reckon you can do as you're a mind to" ..... 32

He, however, had turned on the instant, and with body bent forward and long, firm strokes, was speeding away like the wind toward the scene of danger ..... 96

"That so? The plans must be far-reaching," suggested Robert, looking up with frank admiration at his young friend, standing so straight and slim and determined before him ..... 128

"I'll venture Billy never told it that way at all," Janey evaded irrelevantly. . . . "It's just another effort of Mr. Midsby's to stir up trouble for all of us" ..... 253

Twice, three times, he read the telegram in wonder and uncertainty, then hurried to get the Bible out of his valise ..... 256



“Reckon the old place don’t seem jest as home-like and natural, son, as it used to ’fore you went to workin’ in the bank an’ runnin’ round back thar in them well-settled States,” remarked Mr. Gibson .....288

“I didn’t make the agreement to do all the preaching and talking. I only bargained to be a missionary’s helpmate.” .....293

The evening after their departure Ned and Lu sat down to their lonely supper table to make a pretense of eating .....352

“What’s brought you home this time of the morning?” she asks. . . . “I thought you were going to be unusually busy to-day” .....384

# A Vineyard Story

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE BLACKBERRY PATCH

"Sing a song of sixpence,  
A pocketful of rye;  
Four and twenty blackberries  
Baked in a pie;  
When the pie was open'd  
The juice began to run;  
Was not that a dainty dish  
To set before the son?"

sang Lu Warren, as out among the dense growth of blackberry vines she straightened herself for a moment's relaxation and discovered Robert Clayton leisurely sauntering up the garden path toward her.

"Looking for Janey, I'll be bound," she soliloquized in an undertone, "though by all established precedents he's sure to ask for Ned. Wait, sage, and watch for the fulfillment of thy prediction. I'll play a game on him this time. He'll not find her." And a gleam came into the mischievous brown eyes that peeped out from under her brother Ned's old straw hat.

"Heigh-ho!" called back the young man, taking off his hat and swinging it high in the air. "A very clever parody, but the little maid in the garden had better look out for her nose. If you had lived in the days of Mother Goose you and she surely would have become rivals. I think I like your version best, however, for I'd choose any time to be the son with the

blackberry pie, in preference to a king whose eagerly longed-for dessert turned out to be a squeaky music box instead of the expected delectable dainty."

"Haven't a doubt of it," retorted Lu quickly, lifting her hand, as if in alarm, to the small, sunburned nose; "that is, manlike, provided some one else picked the berries and you didn't have to get your own precious fingers scratched doing it. As for me, I've about come to the conclusion that it might be about as well to have one's nose snipped off as to have it blistered in the hot sun, and that it would be lots more fun to catch the blackbirds. There are only eight sharp claws to each blackbird, and by actual count there are fifty thorns to every berry. Look at that, will you?" and Lu pulled off a black cotton glove, showing a much-scratched wrist and arm.

"That's a shame! You ought to have buckskin gloves," Robert said, sympathetically.

"Mercy!" exclaimed the girl. "Such a luxury is unknown at the brown cottage. They'd cost more than the blackberries are worth. Consequently my poor arms, and nose, too, must be martyrs to the cause, since mother insists that all on account of a certain young man in our neighborhood having a birthday to-day we must have blackberry pie for supper. I brought up every argument I could think of in addition to the scratches, even to the point of stained fingers (and you know the county fair begins to-morrow at Lendhill), but to no avail. Blackberry pie it must be and blackberry pie it *shall* be, and I can assure you that you've a wise preference be-

tween the berries and the birds of the colored race, for mother's blackberry pies are famous."

"I'm sure of it," Robert concurred heartily, helping himself liberally at the first bush he reached, "and I shall partake of the pie with all due meekness and in gratitude to the young lady who suffers for my sake."

"Humble pie all right for you, when I'm obliged to come out while the morning's yet 'dew-pearled' and get my clothes all bedraggled. Dew-pearled morning, I say, is all very well for poetry, but it doesn't work well in practical life. It takes the starch out of skirts and aprons and soaks one's shoes," and Lu looked ruefully down at a small, soiled shoe, and then pounced further into the patch after an immense berry that tried in vain to hide itself behind a leaf.

"I become more and more deeply indebted," said Robert, striding into the patch after her and carrying the bucket, while with the other hand he continued to help himself generously from a well-filled bush.

"Oh, I mean to make you sense the full extent of my sacrifices for you," Lu called back over her shoulder, from under the ridiculously big straw hat, with its torn crown and floppy brim. "That's the way with humanity, you know. Whenever we make martyrs of ourselves for our fellow men, we endeavor to make them realize just how greatly we have been inconvenienced, and what it cost to grant the favor,



thereby causing the other fellow to feel as badly as we can."

Robert laughed. "A keen insight you have into human nature, Lu," he said, rather thoughtfully. "Altogether too penetrating to satisfy the minds of some good, well-meaning people who may think their efforts to help are from the purest motives. I see I shall have to look well to my motives or only sarcasm may be the reward of some of my labors."

"Well, you needn't take everything to yourself, even if you do have to eat humble pie. I was only generalizing, though as you belong to the human family, you must, of course, be 'prone to all mortal weaknesses and frailties flesh is heir to,' as Deacon Rugby used to say. Well, 'open confession is good for the soul,' says the old adage, and I deduce from that fact, that Deacon Rugby ought to be a wonderfully good man by the time he reaches his three-score and ten. He's always so willing to confess his sins and shortcomings, the remedy ought to be efficacious by the time he reaches the end of man's allotment."

Robert threw back his head and laughed heartily. "Lu," he declared, "you've a great head for a little girl. You'll astonish the logicians some day."

"Don't be patronizing. I can't stand it, and for flattery I have no liking. Besides, I'm not a little girl. I'm fourteen, if you please."

"Oh, begging your pardon—I had forgotten you had reached such mature years," Robert replied, dropping a handful of the luscious berries into the



pail; and then added, half absently, "Where's Ned this morning?"

Lu gave one sharp, sidewise glance back at him, and then in the shadow of the ragged brim of the old hat made a comical face, but her voice was irrelevant and demure enough:

"Who?—oh, Ned you were looking for? Why, he's been gone a good two hours to Farmer Grayson's—strange you didn't know he was going out there to-day! Wise prophetess!"

"I—guess I did—but forgot this morning. What's that about a prophetess?"

"Merely a remark I made. I just discovered I was one, and I got the discovery mixed in my conversation."

"May I ask what occasioned the discovery?"

"Why, a prediction fulfilled, of course, stupid."

"Of course, but what does it concern? Nothing disastrous to the blackberry pie, I hope."

"Neither the pie nor the berries, though I must admit that you are more disastrous to the berry patch than anything that's struck it for some time."

"Thanks," said Robert, unabashed, and, helping himself again, he pushed the vines apart for her. "But now since you have discovered you are a prophetess, perhaps you are a preacher also, and can give me a sermon. A young man needs at least one good sermon on his nineteenth birthday."

"I've seen some I thought needed more. Lectures are more in my line. However, I'd try if I had a text."

"Blackberries," replied the young man quickly. "They're as good as any text I know of at present. Here's another lot for your bucket. Now proceed. I'll be the audience, and Robin in the tree will be the choir."

"Very well, then," said Lu, turning around, pushing back the old hat, and giving a sweeping gesture. "Please be attentive and proper, and pick berries while I preach the sermon (with an impressive bow). Brethren and friends, I take for my text this morning one that has been selected by my most venerable parishioner, who has made a special request that I talk to you upon this subject. (Deacon Rugby, you will remember, was always given a *special* request.) My text is the simple and profound one of blackberries. In this text I dare say you will find much food for thought (at least if you swallow as many of them as Robert Clayton has since he entered this patch). You will find it recorded in a number of places—on his face, his white shirt front, on the tips of our fingers, but not so many within the pail."

"Don't hit the members of your congregation so hard. A minister shouldn't be personal. He must be careful how he makes his texts apply or he's likely to wound somebody's feelings and lose his salary in consequence," interrupted Robert, much amused, and pausing to eat again and to watch her animated face.

"Don't interrupt, please. It isn't polite to 'speak out in meetin',' as neighbor Badge does. If the shoe

fits, put it on, says I, and don't look around and nudge your friend and say it applies to him. Please keep on with your work. If I must preach, my congregation must work to support me, for 'the laborer is worthy of his hire.' Now, where was I?"

"In the blackberry patch."

"True enough. As I was sayin', brethren and friends (there seem to be no sisters present), though my text is short it contains much food for thought; and this morning, in the few brief words I have to say to you, I would liken life in this world to a blackberry patch.

"Firstly, your blessings, like blackberries, are pretty much mixed up with thorns, and if you get 'em you've got to stand a good many scratches. You can't just mosey around the edge and make much headway. You've got to push right through the thickest of the briers if you will be successful.

"Secondly, the berries, when you do get 'em, are not always what you expected 'em to be. The biggest and most promising looking black beauty is likely to be sour, while the little ones may be dried up and full of seeds which get fastened between your teeth in an unpleasant fashion, just as some little fol-de-rols may capture our fancy but turn out to be a nuisance."

"Good, good, go on——"

"Thirdly, hidden among the leaves and vines may lie the snake, which like some treacherous enemy is seeking to destroy, and running over your foot startles you out of a year's growth——"

"And causes you to spill a bucket of blackberries," put in Robert, his eyes twinkling with merriment as he remembered Lu's experience of a day or two before when the contents of a six-quart pail had been lost in her efforts to get out of the way of a harmless garter snake.

"Listen. I shall have the usher see that all disorderly persons are expelled from my audience. I must have attention. And do hurry with the berries, for mother needs them right away. What's next—oh, yes. Fourthly. If one proceeds carefully through the blackberry patch, lifting the vines here, pushing them aside there, searching all the hidden places, minding neither bruises nor scratches——"

"Nor snakes," interjected Robert.

"Avoiding all dangers," continued Lu, undisturbed by this reflection, "discarding the seedy ones and the sour, but carefully collecting all the best in the tin pail, behold the reward is sure; for when winter comes, the harvest is ended, and no man can work in the vineyard, on the cellar shelves are rows and rows of jars containing delicious jam, jelly, and blackberry sauce, and with scratches healed and the summer's heat forgotten, the recompense is sweet."

"Bravo! bravo! Well done, little preacher. Your entire parish applauds your ministerial efforts and elects you with one voice to be our future pastor," cried Robert, clapping his hands in undisguised approval. "I could listen to such a sermon all day. I'll venture you could keep even Deacon Rugby awake. Give us a fifthly."



"I'm not so sure there was one. If there was, you disturbed the train of thought so it flew away," said Lu, readjusting the old hat and pulling the cotton glove into place. "Therefore, my sermon is ended, likewise my ministerial career, for though you applaud and elect, I must have more substantial support; therefore do I turn my hand and brain to the more common pursuits of life, leaving my doting parish to find another pastor to lead the flock. See, by your loud clapping you have frightened the choir away."

Robert looked meditatively at the robin, which had flown to a tall elm tree at the edge of the garden. "Our choir is not unlike the most of them," he averred; "it is easily put out about little things, and ready to fly off at a moment's notice."

"Not a bit more uncertain than a parish," declared Lu, "of which I shall have evidence shortly. Here, hand me the pail. Mother never will have enough berries for that pie if it depends upon you. That would be a calamity in her eyes—not in mine. Sermons are what you need, not pies."

"'A little of both, please, and much obliged,' as the Ruggles youngster said in Christmas Carol," replied Robert. "I'm not at all particular—where's Janey?"

"Ah! Right again. What? Janey was it you mentioned?—why, let me see—Janey talked about going to Sarah McEllman's to get a crochet pattern, or down to the store for some sugar; possibly she may have run across to Benders' to get a spool of thread——"



"Come, come," said Robert, hastily, "will she be back again soon from whatever errand she may be on? I want to see her a minute."

"Weary knight! How should I have guessed it? Pray, how am I to know how long she will be gone? Run to the house and ask mother. Tell her, also, that I'll be in with the berries directly. Being thus basely deserted by an entire parish I shall with becoming forgiveness return good for evil by helping to prepare pie in honor of its birthday."

As Robert went laughing down the pathway toward the house, the girl pushed the battered hat back from her forehead, maliciously shook a roguish fist at the young man's broad shoulders, and triumphantly asserted to herself:

"You'll get left this time, Mr. Robert, for you won't find either of them. Mother went after the sugar herself, and Janey's likely to be over at Sarah's all morning for aught I know. Serves you right, for the folks who live in the little brown cottage don't intend to let you steal away the affections of the dearest big sister in the world. If you try it there'll be trouble, so there! I'll be glad when you're safely out of the way at college."

Having vouchsafed this information to none but the robin, who had ventured as far back as the cherry tree, Lu fell to work with her usual dexterity, while Robert, all unconscious of threats so dire, or small brown fists so formidable, paused on the back porch. The house was silent to his repeated knocks

and calls. "That Lu's a rogue," he declared, "and there's no use trying to get anything out of her."

He walked around the house, stood for a moment irresolutely on the front doorstep, and then walked slowly down the walk to the front gate and along the street.

But for once Lu had miscalculated. When Janey had reached the McEllman home she learned that Sarah had gone out of town to spend the day with a friend. Mrs. McEllman was busy in the kitchen, canning fruit and making jelly, so Janey lingered but a few moments. Robert was not half a block away from the brown cottage when she came down the other street and around the corner to the side gate, a slim figure, simply dressed, the brown hair tastefully arranged beneath a small cap, from which a few curls peeped out coquettishly. And the young man, glancing once again over his shoulder as he reached the corner, caught sight of her and immediately turned back.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE GLEN

THE Little Brown Cottage hid itself from the warm July sunshine amid a luxury of vines and foliage. The breeze drifted in among the leaves and played softly around the old-fashioned windows. Impatient young birdlings twittered at each other in their nests. Around the honeysuckle the rhythmic movement of the humming bird's vibrating wing sounded its music, the bee sought nectar from the fragrant white clover, while her cousin, the bumblebee, extracted sweets from the redtop that grew by the roadside.

Janey Warren paused at the gate to look at this scene, as she had done a hundred times since her return home in May. After the long winter spent away from home amid strange scenes, on wide, wind-blown prairies, where she had so strenuously sought to fulfill the duties of a country school-teacher in the cabin schoolhouse, this little home scene had seemed a haven of quiet rest and peace; to her the most radiantly beautiful picture in all the world. And doubly dear to her now were the widowed mother, the helpful brother, Ned, the bright and capable Lu, and the dear little sister, Madeline. Yes, doubly, since the gospel bond united and bound them more closely by its golden cords of divine love and

relationship, which far outlive the ties of flesh, of earth, and time.

Gratefully she thought again of the kind Providence that had given her work during the coming year in the home schools, where whatever troubles or annoyances might arise, she could have the support of the wise, kind mother, and the sympathetic counsel of the little family.

"Dear little home, I hope I shall never have to leave you again," she murmured. "No place will ever be fairer to me; no hearts truer or dearer than those that beat within its walls. I'm glad I could work and help free it, and that I didn't fail. I'm glad of what the lady told me on the train when I went away last year. She said then I was going away to 'love and to lift,' and that when the year was over I'd be glad that I had 'lifted,' and that I had 'loved' well enough to keep on lifting. Oh, I truly am, and may God help me always to be brave and true, for their sakes."

"Lost in solemn meditation, Miss Janey, or just building air castles?" was Robert's query as he approached the figure standing by the gate so quietly as to be almost statuesque.

Janey started perceptibly, for she had not seen him nor heard his footsteps on the smooth, grass-grown side street.

"Neither," she smiled in response. "I have little time for real meditation, and air castles I have small need to build, since I want nothing better than the little brown cottage."



A bit glistening were the soft brown eyes, and Robert turned to the scene. "A pretty enough picture, I admit," he assented, "and quite to my liking. There's a charm there that many a more pretentious home lacks—homey, comfortable, inviting, and restful to look at."

"Of course it can't mean to others what it means to me," said Janey, "but I wouldn't exchange it for a prince's palace."

"No more would I," said Robert heartily, "at least not till the prince was willing; but suppose you leave it now for a walk down to the east meadow. It's shady most of the way, and there are some dandy ferns by the spring. I've been promising mother a long time to get some of them for her fern corner."

"I fear mamma and Lu need me," said Janey, hesitating. "I really feel as though I ought not to go when there's so much to do. I shouldn't have taken the time to go over to Sarah's for a crochet pattern, if she weren't going away for a month's vacation soon."

"Your mother isn't here and Lu has the berries 'most picked. I took your place and have been helping her," replied Robert. "I put at least one handful in the bucket to each three handfuls I ate, and she'll soon have enough."

"You must have been a wonderful help," laughed Janey. "I'm more convinced than ever that she needs me."

"Not a bit of it. This is my birthday and I need you to help me get the ferns. A fellow's birthday

comes but once a year, and I'll never be nineteen again, so you ought to be especially thoughtful of me to-day," coaxed the young man. "Besides, I've a lot of things I want to talk over with you about college work. I'll go in and get your sunshade if you say so."

"No, never mind. I'll go if you promise not to keep me too long."

Lu, coming into the back kitchen porch at that minute, caught a glimpse of the two young people strolling away as leisurely as though life were but a season of leisure and playtime, devoid of care or responsibility, and once again a small brown fist was energetically shaken behind the young man's retreating shoulders.

Lu swept and scrubbed the kitchen floor that morning with a silent energy that it seemed to be necessary to work off. Half an hour later, when her mother had come back from town and was at work in the pantry, making pie crust, the girl dropped suddenly on a kitchen chair near the doorway and burst out impulsively:

"I just never could stand it if Janey should get married!"

Mrs. Warren gave such a start at the suddenness of Lu's exclamation that the case knife with which she was mixing the flour and lard gave a sidewise lurch against the pan, then went out of her hand and over into the almost empty flour bin with a clatter, while the pan containing the mixture barely escaped being tipped over onto the floor.



"Janey get married!" she ejaculated. "Lu, what do you mean?"

"Why, mother," Lu laughed a trifle hysterically, "I didn't mean to make you jump so, but can't you see that Robert finds some excuse to drop in pretty often? It's not *always* to see Ned, if he does ask for him—it's Janey. And besides, I'm positive that young fellow up in Dakota, Billy somebody, writes to her, for I brought home a letter from the post office the other day I'm sure was from him. I teased her, but she wouldn't tell me who it was from."

Mrs. Warren breathed a sigh of relief. "Is that all?" she exclaimed. "How you startled me, Lu, and what put such a crazy notion in your head! Janey's but a child yet, with her work to think about and—us, and Robert is only a big, ambitious boy with his heart in college plans. As for the young man in Dakota, he's one of the farmer boys of the neighborhood, that Janey's been interested in helping."

Lu was silent a moment, but with an unconvinced expression; then, in the most innocent voice imaginable, but with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, inquired demurely:

"Mother, how old were you and daddy when you got married?"

Mrs. Warren, having recovered her knife from the bottom of the flour bin by this time, paused again in her operations, brushed the flour from her hands, looked more thoughtful, then caught a

glimpse of the twinkle in Lu's eyes, and half smiled at her pertinent inquiry. "Why, sure, I was barely eighteen—it doesn't seem possible I wasn't any older than Janey is now—and your father but twenty, but—but—young folks then were older for their years than they are in these days. I shouldn't worry yet awhile, Lu. We need Janey's help for a long time yet, and as for Robert, if he should fancy her, it will take him four or five years to get through college, maybe longer, since he has to work his way, and in the meantime he'll meet with dozens of other girls. So don't get romantic or worried over nothing."

"Well," said Lu, with a relieved sigh, "I'm glad you feel that way about it. I suppose it is silly of me. I guess I'd better go work that butter over and mold it, hadn't I?" And without more ado she was off to the cool cellar, snatches of a gay song drifting back to the low kitchen.

Nevertheless, when the mother was left alone in the quiet of the pantry, her thoughts were of a less sanguine nature than her words had been, and another worry wrinkle creased her brow. "There, there!" she murmured at length, to herself. "It simply must not be for years yet. I couldn't bear it."

Such thoughts, of so disturbing a nature to the mother and sister, were the farthest from Janey's and Robert's minds that morning as they walked along the roadside in the shade of the great elms toward the meadow, one corner of which dipped into a deep ravine, woodsy and cool, its sides formed of

great ledges of rock, overgrown here and there with the soft, green moss, where the water filtered through the crevices. At the very bottom and underneath a wide shelving rock was a miniature, cave-like opening, and here the water bubbled through in a cold, clear stream. This little retreat, one of Nature's choice bits of handiwork, was a favorite resort of the people of Banforth for picnics and short outings, when the time for pleasure and relaxation was not long enough to warrant a trip to the lake and river, several miles distant.

"It's just this way," Robert was saying, as he stopped to push aside a drooping branch that obstructed their way, "I've been handicapped all the way along because of father's being away so much. Not that I'm sorry for it, because we all wanted to do our part and not hinder papa in any way; but you know how a fellow feels when he's ambitious and really wants to get a good education. I never shall forget how I inwardly groaned and lamented, and—well, simply rebelled in my heart over the way things went the year I was fourteen and I learned I'd either have to stop school or papa would have to stay at home. That was the year mother's heart was so bad and one of us simply had to stay at home. Of course I wasn't obliged to do it—they left the matter for me to decide, but I felt like it was about the same thing, and I said papa might go, but I'm afraid that a good many times my thoughts wouldn't have looked good if written out. I'm not at all inclined to think that, though I made the sacrifice,

the pages of that year's record were by any means clean and white, and I'm not particularly hopeful of any reward. However," he added with a laugh, "the training I got then in washing dishes and doing odds and ends of kitchen work a boy so much despises, ought to stand by me in good stead now, for I got a letter this morning in answer to my inquiry for work at Clifton City, that there was a place open in one of the restaurants, where I might do dishwashing for my meals. That seemed to be the only thing left for them to promise me, and I suppose it's as good as anything, and I don't mind it now as I did when I was fourteen."

"I'm so glad you found something," said Janey, brightly. "I was beginning to fear you were going to lose out. Have you told them you'd take it?"

"Wrote them a reply ten minutes after I got the letter and sent it off on the next mail. Tell you what, no college for me unless I find some way to earn my keep. My resources are decidedly limited. I've a few pigs to sell late in the fall and two or three yearlings. I hope to find enough work Saturdays to pay my room rent, then there'll be tuition, books, and general expenses that must be met some way. May have to borrow before the end of the year, if I can find anybody foolish enough to risk making me a loan."

"You're lucky to have even a chance to work your way through college," said the girl, wistfully. "I'd like nothing better, and if it wasn't for helping keep up the home, doing what I can for mother, and keep-



ing Ned, Lu, and Madeline in school, I'd certainly try. I've learned one thing since I began to teach, and that is, one can't get too much preparation for the work. I didn't know how poorly qualified I was till I began. Do you know, I positively ache for the opportunities some of the girls here in town have for school and college? I know I could make better use of them than some of them do, if I had the chance."

"I know you could and would," Robert assented, heartily, "but their hearts are not in it as ours are. There lies the difference. I've simply been amazed at some of the young folks whose fathers are willing and able to give them every advantage along that line and they simply refuse it. Well, I may be a long time getting there, but I hope to make it through some day. Don't suppose I can go longer than one or two years at a time, then I'll have to stop awhile and catch up on expenses. It'll take me till I'm twenty-five or twenty-six to get through, probably, but it's worth working for, even if I am a long time accomplishing it, and the work and experience between times won't do me any hurt; but I sure am getting anxious for September to come and to get away and at it."

Janey gave him a look, half serious, half humorous, then said slowly, "It might be well for you to get your education as soon as possible, Robert. You know I haven't been in this church but a few months, but I've noticed already, and one thing I've learned



is that sometimes the young men are called pretty early to take responsible positions and——”

Robert threw up one hand as if to ward off further speech. “Don’t, Janey, please don’t—I can’t think of it now. It would spoil all my plans, and I’d rather do my work in some other way than that. Our church needs men in all lines, and I hope I may be allowed to do the work of my own choosing. I believe I’m willing to do my share, and—after I get my education I might be willing to accept that if I *knew* He wanted me, I can’t say; but I’d rather teach or enter some profession like that. Anyhow, I’ve been through experiences that make me feel like I never wanted to be a missionary if I could help it.”

“You take things altogether too seriously, Robert,” Janey said, smiling. “I was only mentioning the possibilities, and thought maybe you’d better hurry a little.”

“I suppose I do,” replied the young man, still soberly. “Perhaps it’s because the suggestion of such a thing has been popping up in my mind ever since I can remember, and I never could quite get rid of it, that makes it so serious a matter with me. Though where the thought ever came from I don’t know, unless it’s because father’s a minister and people often expect it of the son. But whenever it has come I’ve always felt like shrinking from it—and—well, sometimes—but let’s not talk about it—there are other things I want to do, and this is an annoying thought.”

“I’m sorry I mentioned it”; Janey spoke gravely

enough now. "I was only in jest, and it isn't a matter one should jest about. But don't you think you had better be a little more careful how you go at that fern? If Lu were here she'd be likely to tell you it isn't a tree or a fence post to be dealt with. Suppose we let that one go and take this one down here. I believe it's a much thriftier plant and it would be better if we can get it out with more dirt remaining about the roots," she added, with persuasive gentleness.

Robert looked ruefully at the much-bedraggled plant which he had half torn from the soft earth, and obeyed her suggestion.

"Didn't I tell you I needed your help this morning to dig these ferns?" he queried as he thrust his light spade into the moist earth at a safe distance from the fern she indicated. "Now you see I wasn't so much at fault in insisting on your coming as you thought I was. Lu is perfectly capable of looking after any manner of housework, and I have her word for it that your mother knows how to make the pies, while you are an eyewitness to the bungle I'm making of this job."

"I'm fully convinced," laughed Janey; "but really, I greatly fear for your college instructors and the restaurant dishes if you plunge after things in this fashion." And the girl carefully lifted the loosened fern, and pressing the soil about its roots, wrapped it in a piece of paper. "Now for the next. Let's take this one."

The conversation soon drifted back to the only

topic that held their absorbed attention, school and college, while they dug the remaining ferns they wanted, loitered at the spring to wash the soil from their hands in its cool waters, and get a refreshing drink where it bubbled out from the ledge of rocks. An hour or more later the two came strolling back up the hill, homeward.

## CHAPTER 3

## A STRONG CORD

THE SHADOWS of an early September twilight were falling in brooding quiet over the broad fields of a certain Dakota homestead. Even in the dim, slow-fading light it was easily discernible that the place was prosperous, for though the barns, granaries, and various outbuildings were somewhat rudely constructed, they were, notwithstanding, substantial, numerous, and filled to overflowing. Near by were great stacks of straw that had been threshed of the golden grain in late summer, which also bore evidence of the rich and abundant crops that had been the reward of those worthy tillers of the soil. The house itself was small, for the pioneer farmer of any locality usually waits till other needs are supplied before he undertakes to provide himself and family with the comforts of a modern dwelling place.

To the northwest, up the sweeping slope, and at the head of a wide slough, nestled the small cabin schoolhouse where only the winter before Janey Warren had spent so many heartsick, homesick days while she had faithfully stuck to her post of duty for the sake of those she loved, so far away in the brown cottage among the hills. The children who crossed the threshold of the little schoolhouse on these sultry September days had not forgotten the little,





“‘It’s all right, son,’ the older man spoke finally, laying his coarse, toil-hardened hand on the strong, young shoulder. ‘It’s all right.... I reckon you can do as you’re a mind to.’”

(See page 37.)





brown-eyed teacher of last year, with her winning ways and gentle heart. Another teacher stood behind her desk now, a woman of mature years, stronger and with wider experience than Janey had had, and one, too, whom it is safe to judge Blake and Andy and Asa, the three boys who had caused her so much perplexity, would not care to trifle with; for the three, though having learned a lesson they would never forget, were still far from reaching that point of excellence in conduct where an occasional firm hand was not needed to keep them in the straight path of duty. As they labored more or less diligently over mathematics or dull history topics, only now and then daring to take a surreptitious glance at each other, make a sly effort to get a bite of apple, or draw a cartoon, there was sometimes a little stirring of the heart when remembering the one who had been with them last year and the heroic fight she had made to save them from the blizzard. The heart of a boy loves the heroic wherever he finds it, and they could never entirely forget the quiet, undaunted firmness of that slender girl teacher as she had fastened them all together in a line with the rope, lest they become lost from each other in the snow, had started out with them in the face of death, and like the faithful little captain she was, had struggled along at the head of the line until they reached warmth and shelter and safety from the cruel elements.

The coal house had been well filled this fall, even

before the school term began. The schoolhouse had been repaired. New strips of weatherboarding covered the places where great gaps had been before. The plastering had been patched up, the black walls had been repainted with fresh, clean-looking paint, the broken windowpanes had been replaced with new ones. The people of that district needed no more hard lessons. They had learned some things as well as the pupils—things they would long remember. During those first days of school the thoughts of the children were often of Janey. There may have been others who thought of her more frequently than would have been guessed.

At the homestead mentioned, in the long, low shed that ran from one side of the barn to the straw stack of gigantic proportions, Mr. Gibson and his young son, Nelson, were milking the cows. One could distinctly hear the cheery rattle of the milk as it struck the bottom of the tin pails, splashed against the sides, soon subsiding into a more subdued sound as the vessels filled up with the wholesome liquid. Over in the haymow of the big barn, Billy Gibson, the older son, a straight, stalwart young man, with strong, muscular arms, was tossing huge forkfuls of hay down to the mangers below. The last glow of retiring day fell through the high loft window on his finely built, manly figure, but was not clear enough to disclose the firm, determined chin, nor the look of resolve that now played about the features of the young farmer.

“There, I guess that’s enough for the brutes to-

night," he said half aloud, after an abundant feed had been tossed down, "and since I've come to a decision I may as well tell dad and have it over with."

He gave the pitchfork a careless toss into the hay at one side, descended the steep ladder to the ground, and going outside, walked over to the granary for a bucket of oats for the work horses. As he returned, his father and Nelson came out of the shed with four brimming pails of milk.

"Here, Nelse," his father said, shortly, "you fasten the doors to the shed and barn so the critters can't get out, while Billy and I carry these pails to the kitchen. I'll be back with the lantern directly and we'll look after the pigs."

"Our pigs have done a right sight well this summer and fall," remarked the farmer as the two carried the heavy pails up the path toward the house, "an' price o' pork been risin' all fall. I 'low we'll have a good bit o' money for 'em in November, an' my, how them young beeves are puttin' on the fat! Seems to me there ain't another place in the world nowheres that can hold a candle to Dakota for wheat an' for a farmer makin' money."

"It's sure been a great year, dad," responded the young man rather briefly, as entering the door of the kitchen the two set the buckets of foaming milk upon the table, where Sally, the daughter and sister, stood ready to strain it into the heavy crocks and set it away to cool.

While the old man stopped to get the lantern, the



younger one waited outside, and when his father came out the door he broke out abruptly:

"Yes, dad, it's been a splendid year—and we've raised the finest crop and got the best stock and farm there is in Dakota. The land will be worth good money to us any time now; but, dad, I'm tired of the farm and of Dakota. I want to know—it's been on my mind for some time—to leave the farm this fall after the crops were all harvested, and take a course at a business college, or preparatory work of some sort. Things are in good shape here now, and my share of this year's crop will pay my expenses several times over."

The older man stood silent for a few moments, regarding his son in the soft twilight with a keen, searching look. When at last he spoke it was with the appearance of a man who had already known and passed judgment on the matter long before.

"I've been a-lookin' for something like this, Billy, for some little time," he remarked, stroking his short, stubby beard with his free hand. "I told ma not long ago you was a-gettin' restless and I know'd you was goin' to take a turn some way. So it's college, is it? Wall, you never know, as I says to ma, what strange notions these young folks air goin' to take in these days. When I brought the family up here and settled you on these prairies, I 'lowed you was always goin' to be satisfied, an' up to this year you seemed to want nothin' better than to raise wheat and 'taters and look after the stock."

"And so I did, father, but—I've changed my mind.



I've nothing against the farm, you know; it's worked out all right, and that land of mine over yonder will give me a splendid start in any business I choose to start into, and—well, the fact is, I want a better education before I settle down on it to stay, or enter into business of any kind. I don't expect to leave the farm entirely, though I don't especially like Dakota, but I've been thinking and can see now where I neglected school opportunities. A young fellow is apt to see such things too late, dad, I reckon; but I thought it wasn't quite too late for me to get some good out of school, and there'll be no foolishness about it nor time wasted if I go now. Somehow, since I joined the church, dad, I see some things in a different light. I used to think it was nonsense to put so much time on books. It doesn't look that way to me any more."

A quick gleam of comprehension flashed into the older man's eyes which the younger man failed to notice. There was a brief pause. Inside the low kitchen Sally was clattering pans and milk crocks and singing in a clear, strong voice.

"It's all right, son," the older man spoke finally, laying his coarse, toil-hardened hand on the strong, young shoulder. "It's all right. I reckon it's the way o' the world. A young feller knows what he wants, and you're of age and can do as you please. Nelse and I can manage things this winter all right. There'll be little to do except feed and water through the coldest spells, an' everything's in good shape for that. So I reckon you can do as you're a mind to.

Where be you thinkin' of goin,' Billy? S'pose you've been a-figurin' on some place."

"I've written to several schools," replied Billy, somewhat hesitatingly, "and I don't know for sure; but think I can get about what I want at Clifton City. It offers everything, and tuition and board are a little cheaper, if anything, than some of the other places."

Again that shrewd understanding flash passed through the father's eyes, but he only said as the young man turned to go into the house, "'Bout as good as any, so far as I know. They're all purty much alike, to me, and I wouldn't know which from t'other; but a young feller sees the difference, I 'low, and will look out for the most likely. Wall, I reckon Nelse'll be thinkin' his old dad's never comin' with the lantern to see about them pigs. But you make up your mind as you like, son. S'pose ma and Sally'll feel badly put out to have you go, but we'll git along."

As he disappeared down the pathway amid the darkening shadows, Mr. Gibson gave a low grunt to himself and chuckled half aloud:

"Mebbe 'tis the church and maybe 'tain't it *altogether* that's calling him into the road o' knowledge. The Lord calls, but he has a mighty indirect way o' leading folks sometimes, an' if I was to make a guess on it this time, I'd say that a little wisp of a school-teacher had hold o' the main string that's pullin' him to college. If I remember the lay o' the land down in that country, Clifton ain't more'n fifty or a

hundred miles from that little village where she lives, an' if I was a bettin' man, I'd take the risk o' puttin' my best span o' mules an' our whole herd o' cattle 'gainst a turkey gobbler that it's the nearest college he could find to where she lives. So I reckon 'tis the school that offers the best chance for him to git what he wants.

"Wall, I don't blame him," the old man chuckled again, "for if I was young and in his shoes, I 'low I'd do the same thing; for a gal like that's worth climbin' up a good many steps o' the ladder o' knowledge in order to git, an' I reckon the cord she's a-pullin' him with is a heap sight stronger than that rope she used last winter to drag the youngsters home through the blizzard."

## CHAPTER 4

## HERE AND THERE

LIFE to certain ones of the young people of Banforth, in whom we are particularly interested, was a busy one that fall. It would be difficult to determine which played the more strenuous part. In the little brown cottage affairs went on much as they had done in the years past, before Janey had taught school the winter in Dakota, only now the financial burden had been greatly lessened by reason of the mortgage being lifted and also through the additional help which Janey's comfortable income brought to the household. She began her work in September in the primary department of the schools with a courage and energy that boded well for the success of her new undertaking, while Ned, just advanced to long trousers, entered upon his third year in high school with his usual zeal and enthusiasm. School life was lacking for him in but one respect. Robert Clayton, early in the month, had gone to Clifton City, and Ned sorely missed him at every turn. Last year, in advance of most of his class in his studies, he had also been the life of the playground, at the head of the ball teams, and the moving factor in all the games and athletic sports.

"It's just like having the main prop knocked right out from under one to have Robert gone," Ned confessed to Janey one evening. "The athletic club's



not half organized and the ball teams are doing punk work. The boys scrap over everything and nobody has sense enough to bring order out of the mix-ups. I can't see how Robert ever did it; he sure was a capital organizer and leader; but how he ever held things together last year and made them run smoothly is more than I can tell. It sure takes a wise head and a diplomat to do it."

"Then there is another thing about Rob," Ned went on, carelessly pulling at a tangle of thread in Janey's fancywork basket as he sat on the corner of the table. "I wonder more and more at the courage Robert had concerning his religion. The boys did hurl some mighty mean thrusts at him about that. He took them as good-naturedly as though they were some part of a game, and I never saw him indignant but a time or two. If they hurt him he didn't show it, though my private opinion is they cut pretty deep sometimes. He and Mamie had to stand against the prejudice alone last year and bear the brunt of it; it's good there's more of us now, but since we joined the church last spring I've learned it isn't the easiest thing in the world to stand persecution, and I wish Robert were here to help us."

"Well, maybe it's the best thing for us, though," replied his sister, thoughtfully. "Of course these experiences are all new to us, but if he were here perhaps we'd lean too much on him, and the Lord wants us to learn to stand for ourselves. That's one of his great tests."

"I suppose so," Ned responded; then added, "But,

Janey, he certainly is the best fellow in the world. I never saw anyone who could beat him."

Janey laughed. "You're a hero worshiper, Ned. I'll admit he's splendid in many respects, but you're apt to be extravagant in your ideas when you talk of Robert."

"I tell you such fellows are mighty few and far between, and if you understood boys as a brother has the opportunity to size them up, sis, you'd say so, too—Robert Clayton is a boy in ten thousand."

"Don't sing Robert's praises to Janey; she don't need 'em," exclaimed Lu, popping her head through the doorway at that instant. "If I've called supper once I've called it at least five times, and I venture the assertion you haven't heard me at all. The potatoes are getting soggy, the steak cold, and the amiable cook is losing her temper."

"Then do let us hurry by all means," cried Ned, dropping down and starting in haste for the kitchen. "Soggy potatoes and cold steak are bad enough, but an ill-tempered cook, oh, my!"

Far from looking the part of a disgruntled individual, however, the little cook busied herself serving a wholesome and appetizing supper to the happy family circle that gathered around the board; a particularly jolly little group that evening, for it had been one of those days when the world had gone well with them, and they were in good spirits.

It must be admitted that Lu's school studies were sadly broken into at times that fall by household duties; for Janey's tireless work in the schoolroom

taxed her frail strength and left her unable to do much work at home evenings and mornings, though she came in for her full share on Saturdays; but Lu, possessed of a much stronger and more vigorous constitution, managed with Madeline's help to carry the greater burden of the housework and at the same time keep pace with the average students of her class, while the mother continued to take in the usual amount of sewing as had been her wont for many years since the father's death.

Across the village, in the Clayton household, Mrs. Clayton had that very day been disposed to count her blessings as she and Mamie sat in the small living room by the grate fire, looking over winter clothing and sorting out that which would be available to make over and renew.

"The Lord surely has had consideration for our needs," she sighed thankfully. "I don't see how we could have gotten along this year without Robert if the church hadn't arranged for your father to labor near home. It's such a blessing to have him home again after being sent to distant fields for so long. Every day I seem to feel more and more God's thought and care for his children, and that his hand is over all our ways."

"Yes, mamma, and Robert would have felt it so dreadfully if he couldn't have gone to college this year," declared the daughter as she clipped off the buttons from a worn-out garment and dropped them into the button box. "It's hard enough to get along without him, even with papa here. We'd

'most die of lonesomeness if they were both gone, and how would we ever manage things?"

"I suppose there would have been some way provided," replied the mother, cheerfully; "there always has, but it is such a comfort that he provided this way, and I'm glad Robert didn't have to meet disappointment again. He's had plenty of them to meet all the way along in his efforts to get school opportunities. I only hope," she added with a mother's anxious solicitude, "that college life won't spoil him in any way, and that he'll be as faithful and honorable a young man as he has been honest and true as a boy, and that he'll allow nothing in the new atmosphere to swerve him from the manly principles which thus far have made his character so strong and noble."

"Mamma, Robert will not change, only to be better and stronger, if that were possible," Mamie exclaimed quickly, with the implicit confidence and trust that is ever the heritage of the younger sister whose brother has been her ideal from babyhood. "Robert won't do wrong things; he just *couldn't*."

"He wouldn't want to, I know, dear; but there are temptations that every young person must meet when they venture forth into the world that none can realize until they are confronted with them, and though Robert is the best boy in the world to us, I know he is human. There is always the possibility that the strongest may fail; but if he comes back to us, when his college work is done, as



true a son and brother as he has always been, I shall have little fear for the future."

It did seem providential in more ways than one that Elder Clayton had been assigned to his home mission that year. Aside from the comfort and help he could be to his family, there was an abundant need for labor to be done in this district. A strong spirit of prejudice was prevalent in a large portion of the territory, and in no part of it was it more apparent than in the little village where they lived. He had made strenuous efforts that summer to arouse an interest and to allay this prejudice in the minds of the people of Banforth and to do his utmost to spread the message of truth among the people. Seconded by the efforts of wife and daughter, the inmates of the brown cottage, and the faithful Farmer Grayson (the latter sparing neither time nor means in order to help him get to the different points of his mission) he pushed the work forward as rapidly as possible, meeting with a degree of success in some places. Strange to say, however, in Banforth every advance move he undertook to make was met with a repulse. Churches and halls were alike closed against him, even the use of the town park was obtained with the greatest difficulty, and trustees of the country church out near Farmer Grayson's still held firmly to their first decision against any meetings of the Latter Day Saints.

So the little band had to content themselves that summer by holding their Sunday school, preaching services, and occasional prayer meetings at one of

the two cottages in town, with an occasional Sunday in the park, or out at Farmer Grayson's, when that good farmer had time to drive in with his big team and wagon after them, and this, with a one-week series, constituted the extent of their activities until the coolness of autumn made outdoor meetings no longer comfortable or propitious.

## CHAPTER 5

## A NEW FRIENDSHIP

CLIFTON CITY, a busy, enterprising little place of some several thousand inhabitants, occupied the narrow confines of a strip of land but little more than a half mile wide and some three miles in length, which stretched itself in a long sweeping half circle around the base of a high and precipitous cliff. Bending about the city on its outer side, like a great shimmering bow, were the clear shining waters of Silver River, which having come thus far on its way by a long, circuitous route, seemed as it passed around the city to have suddenly gained a definite purpose, and from thenceforward took a straight and almost unswerving course for many miles down the broadening and richly fertile valley.

Clifton City was connected with the commercial world by but one railroad, but the traffic which fell to its lot had been of such importance that the company erected a neat and imposing brick building to accommodate its patrons. Also close to the bank of the stream it had established good-sized switch yards and built a commodious freight depot, that the products of the factories might be placed with facility upon the market. The town boasted of a number of these factories, some dealing in canned goods, others manufacturing woolen and cotton

fabrics. A small foundry, and at least one meat packing establishment, and a soap factory were in evidence.

The majority of these were built out on the water's very edge. Commerce was not entirely monopolized by the railroad, however, for the river was navigable to a short distance above the city and occasional steamers carried goods of Clifton City manufacture down the river to other points.

But while Clifton City boasted of its factories, its thrift, and its commerce, and looked upon its enterprises with an eye of satisfaction in much the same way that a landed proprietor might view his rich estates, there was something deeper than this noticeable in its attitude towards the institution that reposed high above it on the great cliff—a touching tenderness, a fond pride, a solicitude that more nearly resembled a parental affection for the child dependent upon its love and care, than for inanimate things which brought returns in mere dollars and cents. This institution was the Clifton City College, and no more beautiful site could have been found in miles around than the one selected. Steep and precipitous as was the cliff on its northward curve, to the southward the descent was a long, gradual slope that formed an ideal location for buildings and campus. The buildings themselves were all of gray stone, solid and rugged looking, but relieved and softened by the luxuriant ivy which clung to the rough walls and spread itself so thickly that when the summer foliage grew heaviest little could



be seen of them but the broad windows and occasional patches of gray peeping through. The campus was bordered by elms and maples, as were also outlined in pleasing relief the walks and driveways; but great native trees of nature's own planting, grown strong and enduring with the years, lent their special charm of adornment to the grounds, while at the foot of the slope was a heavy grove of oak, ash, hickory, and cottonwood, where students in the fall and early spring evenings were wont to hie themselves for the "weenie" and marshmallow roasts, or for moonlight picnics. In the autumn time, when the frost, lingering in the valleys and creeping up the hillsides, touched these masses of foliage and turned them into flaming scarlet, and mingled with it the gleaming, sunshiny gold of the maples and the deep-toned browns and greens of the oaks, the hillside became one riot of color. Clifton people fully believed this scene rivaled the picturesqueness of any found in the eastern hills, or even among the Rockies.

Resting thus far above the city, connected with it only by a single street car line and highway, thus away from the confusion and jostle of its streets, free from its heat and din, above the dust and smoke of its factories, it had that higher, broader outlook of the world which seemed typical of its culture and purpose.

As Robert one fine September afternoon climbed the long hill with the springing buoyancy of youth, and followed the winding pathway that led through

the little birch grove at his right, his eyes feasted on the beauty of the landscape as his soul for the past few days had reveled in the opportunities for learning that were widening before him. His was a deep, earnest mind, that delighted in delving into the stores of knowledge and searching out her hidden treasures, and never before had he been so free and unrestrained in this purpose as he had felt since entering upon this new, glad college life.

Stopping as he reached the upper edge of the birch grove, he bared his head to the soft breeze drifting up from the valley.

"It's great," he murmured; "the wooded valley down there, the river, and the hills; but most of all this hill itself—the campus and the buildings and all they stand for—I wish the folks at home could see it."

Only for a moment, then he resumed his course up the hill; for he wished to prepare one lesson for the morrow before the supper bell rang; besides he had few moments for leisure or idle contemplation.

The room Robert had selected was little more than a small corner in the very top story of the boys' main dormitory. He had taken it, not from choice, but for economy's sake; for on account of being small, poorly located, and difficult to heat, it was offered at the cheapest rates. Its inconveniences were partly compensated by the splendid view that could be obtained from the one window. For miles and miles one could see up the river to the hills partly covered with forests, their crests veiled in shadowy

mists of purple. Narrow, beautiful valleys, threaded by a stream or roadway, lost themselves among them. Just beneath lay a portion of the little city, its boat landings plainly visible, its factory walls dingy and smoky, while here and there the occasional glimmer of a tall spire indicated a place of worship. Robert had been at Clifton City as yet but a short while, but he had already ascertained that none of them were representative of his own faith, and among the hundreds of students that crowded the college halls he had met with no familiar faces. It was all new and strange, and yet to his liking, except—yes, he would be glad to find among that throng one of his own religious belief. Not that he felt particularly alone; not that he lacked companionship or held himself aloof from the society of other students. Quite to the contrary, his friendly nature and genuine love for his associates had already won for himself friends among the students, as they had won for him the good will and loyalty of the high school boys at Banforth. No, he had felt no lack in that respect, but he did miss the other as he had missed it when they had first moved to Banforth.

He had never felt this more keenly than he did the following afternoon. An irritating nervous headache had been troubling him all day and was leaving him decidedly out of spirits. As he stood at one side idly watching a long line of students stream out of the hallway of the main building and cross the campus to the Medical Hall, he suddenly had a great

desire to know if among them there were any who were allied with the same faith as he. His last class period was finished for that day, and with a sudden impulse he turned and entered the great building from which the long line had now entirely emerged, and passing down the hall, went straight to the registrar's office. Obtaining permission of the assistant at the desk, he sat down by the table and began running through the registration cards.

It seemed almost an endless task, and the young man, after searching for a long time, began to think it a fruitless one, when at last he paused, his hand on a card filled out in a free and easy-flowing handwriting: "William Maxwell Gibson," he read, "born August 15, 18——," (age twenty-one, was Robert's mental calculation). "Denomination, Latter Day Saint (Reorganized Church), parent's name, William Henry Gibson; residence, Brighton, North Dakota; Commercial Department."

Robert's heart gave a great bound.

"Brighton—where have I heard that name? Must be one of the places where father was last winter. Seems to me I've heard somebody mention it. Why, sure it is—that was Miss Janey's post office address last winter and where father was for a short time. Maybe it's one of the very families he baptized, though I don't remember hearing Janey speak of him—let's see—" glancing over the card again, "'William Maxwell Gibson,' age twenty-one—sounds pretty good, just the right age to be companionable



if he's the right sort. Well, whoever he is, he'll look good to me to-day, for I'm blue as indigo."

Robert copied down the name and room assignment. The large body of commercial students were in class at that hour, so he must wait. The room was in the Y. M. C. A. building, number ten, second floor, one of the best rooms, Robert took mental note as he passed that building on his way back and located it.

"Whoever he is he must have ample means to pay his way," was his conclusion, "and not a poor duck like me."

That evening he lost no time after his menial task at the restaurant kitchen was finished, but before going to his room for study, he crossed the campus again to the Y. M. C. A. building, and traversing the long corridor of the second floor, knocked at room number ten. It was answered instantly by a cordial, "Come in," and Robert, opening the door, stepped into a large, pleasant room, comfortable and well furnished. A young man, rather handsomely built, dressed in light trousers and loose lounging jacket, sat tipped back in his chair, with his feet resting on the sill of the big south window. About him were scattered books and papers promiscuously, and in his hands were pencil, tablet, and textbook. The face he turned toward his visitor was sun-tanned to a deep brown; the blue eyes, large and expressive; and the thick mop of hair looked as though it had been considerably rumpled by restless fingers while

the brain wrestled with ledger accounts and computations.

"Mr. Gibson?" Robert asked simply, closing the door and advancing into the middle of the room.

"It is," replied the other, still remaining seated, but looking at him with frank, inquiring eyes.

"Pardon me; my name's Robert Clayton—a stranger to you, but I'm a Latter Day Saint, and I found your name registered as one also, and—thought—maybe you'd be glad to meet——"

William Maxwell Gibson's feet came down from their elevated position with a thump, the book, tablet, and pencil flew in various directions, as he sprang up, and there was a warmth in his tone and a welcome in his handclasp that promised well for the friendship of the two young men.

"Should say I am glad—what's the name again?—Robert Clayton? Clayton—why, why, we had an Elder Clayton out our way last winter who baptized most of our family—any relation to him?"

"Rather think I am some," Robert replied with a laugh, and then with a touch of pride in his voice, "He's my father."

"Possible! That's great! Well, can't say but there is a likeness all right. Here, have a chair and pray excuse the appearance of this room. Don't have time to keep it straight with all these pesky problems in mathematics to work out, ledger accounts to keep, and penmanship practice. You see I've let the wheels get pretty well clogged up while I've been planting potatoes and sowing wheat the past few

years, and my mental machinery's got rusty lying around. Takes some time to get it oiled up and in good working order again," and the young man laughed good-naturedly as he emptied the chair of a load of papers, so Robert could sit down.

Robert joined in the laugh, and with it the last vestige of formality or strangeness between them was gone. For the first time since Robert had left home, books and study were neglected while they talked and laughed together in comradely fashion and the evening slipped by. Before they separated for the night each felt as though he had known the other for years.

## CHAPTER 6

## THE CHALLENGE

C LIFTON COLLEGE was not unlike other colleges in most of its customs. It had the usual number of clubs, fraternal societies, sororities, and social organizations of various kinds. Chief among these were two literary societies which were about equally divided as to numbers, as they may have been said to be equally aspiring in their efforts to excel each other and gain the highest honors. So great rivalry had existed between them at times as to have engendered a considerable degree of envy and jealousy among some of the members of their ranks.

The older of these two organizations distinguished itself by the name of The Agathean Club, thereby announcing its temperament and principles to be rather on the aristocratic order. It prided itself as having within its circle only such students as came from the most "select" families, which "select" privately interpreted by some of the students, was not always confined to families of rank or long-standing honor, but was meant to include those who had plenty of money and were willing to spend it lavishly.

With a more democratic idea in mind, and in consideration of the brotherly feeling the term implied, the members of the other society had chosen to style themselves Erodolphians.



It numbered in its ranks only those students who came from the common walks of life. It made no distinction on account of money, or rank, or family. It did, however, make a few requirements of those asking for admittance; one of these was their standing as students; another, personal conduct. Some of its members were there by choice, and some were there because they had not money to admit them to the other.

With the latter of these two organizations very early in the fall the names of Robert Clayton and William Maxwell Gibson were enrolled. The former could not have entered the Agathean Club if he had been so inclined, having neither money nor family rank to entitle him to membership, and the latter, though having sufficient funds, had that broader feeling towards humanity which was so fully expressed in the translation, "We are brothers."

The Erodelphians, however, during the past year had met with a series of defeats that had been discouraging and disheartening to its membership. In various competitions, sometimes justly, but more than once unjustly as thought by some, it had been pronounced the loser. Popular opinion had, of course, to a large extent, favored the Agatheans, and popular opinion has the peculiar knack of knowing how to assist some judges in making their decisions with reference to the winner of a contest, whether of oratory, debate, athletics, or whatever the case may be. Injustice had been meted out to the Erodelphians more than once in this way, and

the Agatheans had become unduly boastful over their success.

So it was that when our two young friends entered that fall they found the condition of the society in a low state of spirits, the members disheartened, the forces broken, enthusiasm wanting, leadership lacking, and a general state of inactivity prevailing. Neither Robert nor William were the kind to enter into anything and remain inactive. If they were to take part it must be to some purpose, else what was the use of entering? Both were full of the vigor and enthusiasm of young manhood, and both were energetic in whatever they might undertake. Consequently when they found themselves together in the same cause, working for the same ends, keenly sensing the rivalry they had to meet from the other society, instead of giving way at once to feelings of defeat and inconsequence, they allowed it only to whet their wits to a keener edge. And as a matter of fact, two healthy, sound, strong-minded, enthusiastic young men could not join their forces with any cause, however inert, without infusing new life and energy into it and making their influence felt to a large degree. And so it occurred that but a short while after their names were enrolled on the books of the Erodolphians, a change became noticeable, new life seemed to animate their circle, and a spirit of activity awakened them from their dormant lethargy. Reorganization was soon talked of, decided upon, action was taken accordingly, and the result of the first election of officers was the astonishing

one of placing Robert as president, with Billy close by him as vice president. Both were surprised, utterly taken aback, and both for the moment were dismayed; nevertheless, both felt that there was no alternative, no looking backward in contradiction to their enthusiastic speeches on several occasions to "push" and "push hard."

"It is like this, Gibson," Robert said as the two walked along the street together after the meeting, "we've got to make good; that's all there is to it. Somehow or other the fellows have the idea that we can make the thing go, and we mustn't fail 'em. There are heaps of plans running through my brain, more than we'd have time to accomplish in three years, to say nothing of one; but we must prove to the Agatheans that we can win in something, and that'll do more to encourage our boys than anything else."

"That's the stuff," declared Billy, with customary emphasis and cheerful disregard of polite phrases, "and we'll do it, too, Bob Clayton; see if we don't. Our boys are every bit their equal in muscle, and have twice the brains, if they'll only wake up and show them what they can do. Anyhow, as we were not here last year and haven't the experience back of us, we're just green enough to believe we can succeed, and to try."

"I'm mighty glad they elected you instead of Del Kenson. Del hasn't much push, and I know we can work together. I only wish it had been put the other way about with us and you had my place. You

can make the skies look brighter in two minutes than anybody else I ever saw."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Billy, disclaiming any credit. "I'd be a poor stick if you weren't at the head of the thing. You've got enough executive ability to constitute a general. I couldn't go ahead and organize like you can to save my life, but I can back you up and boost a bit, and I'm glad they put you in your proper place. But it's not very late," he added, as they paused on the steps of the Y. M. C. A. building. "S'pose you come in for a few minutes and we'll run over some of your plans and then we can both be thinking about them in the meantime. We'll have to get busy, that's sure."

"You're right there," acceded Robert, without hesitation turning in. "I believe I will stop and talk things over with you a little while."

The two proceeded quickly up the steps to the second floor, and down the long corridor to Billy's room.

"Now dispose yourself according to your likes," said Billy, hospitably, as he flung the door open and tossed his cap carelessly on the table, motioning for Robert to do likewise. "There's the couch, or here's the easy chair (and it's a dandy to lounge in)—or you may sit on the table, or even the floor, if you wish."

"Thanks," replied Robert, but choosing a straight-backed chair and drawing it up to the table. "I'll return your courtesy when you visit my humble abode by offering you a goods box or a low stool. I don't usually scorn your rockers and easy couches



when I have a chance, but I'll accept none of your easy things to-night for I'm all business and believe I can do my work better here."

"Just as you say," replied Billy; "and to be congenial I'll take a straight-back too, though it's against my principles," and turning one around, he sat down astride of the back, his arms resting comfortably upon the top. "Now, fire away with your big plans."

"The fact is," began Robert, scarcely waiting for his friend to get settled, "you know how the Agatheans are feeling elated over their successes of last year, and they're already threatening to challenge us. I heard in a roundabout way among the boys that they're talking track meet for some time next month. If that's so, I believe we can make a good showing, and I'm rather hoping it is so. I'm inclined to think that in the short time we have for preparation we'll stand a better chance to beat 'em in athletics than in oratory or debate; for we can soon sound the strength of our boys, and if we make a success of this it'll go a long ways to encourage them for future work."

"Capital," agreed Billy, "and I'm not afraid to take a try at some of those kinds of stunts myself—say a hundred-yard dash or a half mile run, provided somebody will coach me a bit. I've never done the work, you know, on an out and out track," he added modestly, "but some of us boys up there in Dakota got the notion a year or two ago that we could do about as well as some of these college fel-

lows we read about in the State contests, and we clipped in for a try of it. There's plenty of room up there to run if you want to," he chuckled, "and so we tried it out upon the long ridges. One of us got a book and we studied breathing and motion and a lot of things along with them, and we practiced the half mile and mile runs, the fifty and hundred-yard dashes, and did cross-country trotting to a fare-you-well, and sometimes we didn't make any mean record, either."

"Good!" exclaimed Robert, whose enthusiasm had been rising with every sentence of Billy's narration, and whose mind was leaping rapidly forward to the possibilities. "You have the muscle, too, tough and well seasoned with outdoor life, that will outdo a lot of these fellows that are soft yet and have to work up to it by degrees."

"I'll need considerable coaching, likely," Billy interposed. "You see we got out there only what we could practice and from the books. Our work was lame, I haven't a doubt."

"Never mind; I can give you a little of that myself. I did most of the training of the high school boys at Banforth last year, and when we lived at Fairfield a number of us had a chance to get training from one of the best athletes in the State. Say, but he was a dandy! Besides, I know Professor Lowe will give us help any time we ask it. The main thing with me is to get the time."

"Two can wash dishes faster than one," suggested Billy, "if one is a green hand; and some day

when we're in a hurry to get out to the field, we'll see."

"Thanks," replied Robert, "I won't reject an offer like that. I'm not afraid to try the fellows on an eight-eighty run myself, after I've had a little practice; I think we've a number of pretty good runners among our boys, and as for pole vaulting I saw that Archie Brownell do the slickest, neatest thing the other day. I honestly believe there's not another student in college could have done it. I'm going to mark him down for that right now. I've seen several doing good work on the short dashes and the broad jumps, too. As for the discus throwing, I don't know what about that. Hadn't we better get the boys together some time to-morrow and sound our forces a bit?"

"So I should think—not a day later than to-morrow, if you can possibly do it," acquiesced Billy. "We want to be ready for the Agaths any time, and head 'em off before they know it. What do we need? Any paraphernalia to begin with? Let me know what's wanted."

Robert looked up a trifle absently this time, from the list of names he was busy jotting down on a piece of paper and making unintelligible signs opposite, and reflected. "I'll see," he said after a moment. "There's no rush about that now. Of course there will be track suits and so forth to see about, but we won't bother about anything of that sort till we see them all to-morrow and find out whether the meet will come off or not. We want the other side

to do the challenging—we don't care to do that, but I'm reasonably certain they're going to do it, and right away, too."

A sudden flicker of the electric lights brought the two friends from the absorption of their task and to a realization of the quick flight of time. It was the warning signal for everyone to be in his own room. Five minutes later the outer doors would be locked and the lights would go out.

"Whilikens!" exclaimed Robert, springing to his feet. "Who'd have thought it was that time? I'll have to make a dash for my room at two-forty gait or I'll be locked out. When can we meet?" fishing his cap from the deluge of papers they had scattered over the table.

"Any time you say," replied Billy. "How about to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock? Can you get away at that time?"

"Guess that's about as good a time as any," Robert made answer, as he hurried down the hallway and stairs. "Tell the secretary first thing in the morning, will you, Gibson?" he called back from the outer door, "and have him notify them as soon as possible," and he was gone.

Billy hoisted the window and yelled after his rapidly retreating figure, outlined clearly in the moonlight, "Go it, Clayton; clip to it. An Agath won't stand any show 'gainst that kind of sprinting." And the window went down again with a thump.

The following afternoon at the appointed hour a goodly representation of the Erodolphian Society



gathered on the athletic field adjoining the college gymnasium building. The challenge from the Agatheans had been forthcoming that morning, and as they assembled on the field and began to discuss plans, enthusiasm soon reached a high pitch. Billy visited each cluster of boys as they gathered here and there, and talked with his characteristic zeal and animation, which added to their courage; then Robert appearing a trifle later called them all together and, elevating himself on the remains of an old broken wheelbarrow that by chance had been left near the grounds, delivered such a spirited speech as fired the heart of every listener to do his utmost for the cause he represented. Several made a mental note of this occurrence, feeling that if the Agatheans ever challenged them for an oratory contest or debate, that the Erodelphians need not fear to meet the emergency.

The result was that when they dispersed that evening everyone present felt determined to do his part against all odds for the success of the whole. And this feeling had not abated one whit when they met for the next practice, this time not on the college field but on the high school ball ground southeast of the town, which they felt would be quieter, and where they would be less disturbed by others. Most of these boys knew the value of work and training. Some of them were among the number who had been beaten the year before in contests with Agatheans, but all were united in the one purpose to work, and to work and win, and they went at it with a vim

that looked promising to Robert, and to the professor who had been called into service in the training. Both he and Robert were kept busy criticizing, encouraging, directing, making notes, and assigning places.

"Fine, Billy; that was a dandy run," Robert cried enthusiastically, as Billy finished the half mile trial run around the track. "You'll make good on the eight-eighty all right, won't he, Professor Lowe?"

"Quite well done in the main," replied the professor, cautiously qualifying his commendation. "You seem to have the first requisites to a successful half-miler, Gibson—good wind, which means endurance, well-seasoned muscles, and I see you're not afraid of hard work."

"That's the truth," interjected Robert.

"However," the professor continued quietly, "there are some improvements which you must make. First, under the strain incident to the final dash of the run you must be on your guard to prevent your muscles from disobeying your will. Prevent unnecessary fatigue by reducing the lost motion to a minimum. Second, shorten your stride a little in the finish, but don't make it 'choppy.' Third, hold your head erect and extend your chest a little more.

"It might be well to caution you, also," he added as Robert was about to speak, "that above all it is necessary to cultivate the art of self-possession. Don't allow yourself to waste nervous energy because of the excitement which may prevail. Remem-

ber that at all times and under all circumstances the mind should be master."

"That was more praise than the prof usually finds convenient to offer," declared Robert, as Professor Lowe moved off to another part of the field. "That much from him means a lot, and I feel right now that we're going to be able to bank on you for a winner in the half mile."

"What about yourself?" asked Billy. "Ain't that your special stunt? You'd better run, too."

"We'll see a little later," Robert replied, briefly. "If it seems necessary to make doubly sure, we can both run, though I rather think you'll be able to beat me if I don't look out."

Over on the other side of the field at this moment Archie Brownell was demonstrating his agility in pole vaulting, and Jack Jones was making some long shots in discus throwing. Before the hour of practice work was over, Jess Benson was counted as good on the hundred-yard dash, "though you'd better get ready for that, too," Robert whispered confidentially to Billy. "He's all right if he doesn't lose his head, but I'm a little fearful, and that brother of his can run like a race horse when it comes to a short distance. He'll be able to make it on the fifty-yard dash, but he hasn't enough wind for a longer run."

And so it went through the list of tests that try the skill and muscle of ambitious youth.

## CHAPTER 7

## "WE ARE BROTHERS"

"Ho for the Agatheans! Ri! ri! ri!  
'Round the race track watch us fly;  
The prize we'll take—  
The race we'll make—  
Zip! Buzz! Speed high!  
Ri! ri! ri!"

The yell came in a resounding chorus from lusty throats as the rooters for the Agatheans streamed across the campus, their purple and gold pennants now fluttering gayly, now waving wildly, according to the vigor of their demonstrations. Like an answering echo came the rival yell from a cluster of the supporters of the Erodelphian cause, easily distinguished by their navy caps with white bands and their navy and white ribbons:

"Erodelphians, best in the land,  
Ready, steady, valiant band!  
Nerve, pluck, courage, grit,  
Earn it, win it, get up, git.  
Ero, Ero, 'way we go!  
Who Ro? Who Ro? Ero-o!"

A wild yell of derision from their opponents, one of approval from a few of the bystanders, all of which were soon drowned by successive rival yells which followed close upon each other until everything was in readiness for the sport to begin.



The day was ideal in every respect, with fresh, inspiring October air, and mellow sunlight that threaded its gold amid that of the remaining yellow leaves which still clung daringly to their homely boughs in sturdy defiance of nature's stern decree. The oaks alone held their summer robes still intact without rent or signs of fraying, an evidence of the enduring qualities of the material with which they were made. Unchanged they were, save as to color, and Jack Frost, who seemed to have a decided aversion to green, and whose dye pots always are plentifully supplied with brilliant materials, no matter what the shortage may be elsewhere, had capriciously turned them from the deep greens to the rich reds and browns that better suited his own artistic fancy. The ivy hung like mantles of scarlet about the great gray stone buildings on Clifton Heights, and far below, the shining surface of Silver River reflected the deep blue and peaceful serenity of the sky.

The campus was alive with spectators in gala attire. It seemed as though almost all Clifton City had turned out for the occasion. Even many of the neighboring towns were represented, actuated by the interest they had in certain students from their own vicinity. A considerable degree of excitement prevailed, and there was an abundance of sympathizers for either side, though it was felt by the boys of the Erodelphian Society as they prepared themselves for duty, that the Agatheans had the best of them in that respect.

"How you feeling, Billy?" Robert asked, as hurrying through the gymnasium building on some errand, he ran across that young gentleman calmly making his final preparations for the field.

"Fine as a fiddle," replied his comrade, heartily. "Never felt better in my life. What do you say? Am I to help Benson out with that hundred-yard dash, or do you and the prof feel pretty sure he can make it?"

Robert paused. "Professor Lowe thinks he'll do, though we've both been a little doubtful at times, Gibson. If I were sure you wouldn't get done up for the half mile run, I'd ask you to take this, too. I'm no good at all myself on a short dash. It takes me time to work up; besides, I think we both better enter for the half mile. They have four to enter on that and they tell me Chester Mendell is some runner, so we don't want to take any chances."

"I'm not afraid of the hundred-yard dash hurting me in the least for the eight-eighty," Billy replied, confidently. "It'll just give me a good start, and if you say so it's a go."

"All right, then," said Robert, decidedly; "I'd sure feel a lot safer if you were in the race. You know Benson is splendid at times, but at others he simply loses himself. I'll leave it to your judgment to enter if you think best."

From the very beginning of the contests the results had showed up surprisingly in favor of the Erodolphians, and the spirits of their sympathizers and supporters, as well as their own, kept steadily

rising. With a steadiness and determination that astonished their opponents they won victories that surprised even themselves. Archie Brownell did not fail them. He had in a short time outdone any previous record he had made and consequently had outdone the others. Elmer Carter, one of the youngest of the Erodelphians, soon held the winning record for the running jump. The short runs, though closely contested, had largely resulted favorably for the Erodelphians, and their enthusiastic rooters were yelling themselves hoarse in wild exultation. When the time came for the hundred-yard dash the Agatheans had made few points, except in the broad jumps and discus throwing. Both sides felt that this was to be one of the two hardest contested races on the field. The other was the half-mile run. Rumor had reached the Erodelphians that it was upon these two the Agatheans especially prided themselves in the ability of their runners, and believing this to be true, it was upon these two that Robert and Billy had concentrated their own best efforts. Billy had no hesitancy when the time came for entering. Far from being concerned over it, he was glad of the permission, and neither he nor Robert regretted their decision.

Brick Morton and George Larby, the Agathean runners who entered this race, were no mean opponents, as Robert and Billy were soon aware. So also was Jess Benson aware of it, and the discovery soon caused him to weaken. Not so with Billy, who, with head erect, chest extended, and with straightforward

motion shot forward like a swift, unswerving arrow. Down the lanes they came, cheered by the hundreds of onlookers. Larby began falling behind a trifle, and Brick Morton's face was beginning to show the tensivity of the strain. Billy was scarcely more than even with him as they neared the goal, but Robert noted with a glad heart-throb that his face gave little evidence of his powerful exertion; that his body was under good control, and that his wind was perfect. A moment more and he breasted the tape, a trifle in advance of his rival, with a countenance as smiling and unstrained as though it had been but mere play.

The shouts were deafening for a few minutes. There had been but an instant's difference in time in which the two had reached the goal, yet those standing nearest had seen that Billy had won with very perceptible ease.

From that moment the Agatheans rapidly diminished in courage and became disheartened. Here they lost and there they lost, until when the time came for the half-mile run only a few minor points had been gained. Both sides squared themselves now for the last trying ordeal.

"I'm glad we both worked up for this," Robert whispered to Billy as the two were making themselves ready. "The Agaths have felt so sure of this. They'll have four in the race and I know that Chester Mendell is a stunner. Running together gives me more confidence, anyhow. We've two chances to four in the race."



"There you're right," assented Billy, "giving a sidewise kick at his discarded robe, and stretched himself up full length. "But they've been too dead sure on a good many things. If we don't beat 'em this time I'll miss my guess. Anyway here's for it, and luck go with us."

Loud cheers were raised for each contestant from the two clusters of rooters, followed with one long shout by the spectators as the six track runners took their places and awaited the signal to start; then an intense hush held everyone in breathless suspense as they dashed off. Robert's tall, muscular figure, perfectly trained and under absolute control, shot forward at a medium rate of speed which was gradually increased with every stride. Billy, a little shorter and sligher in build, kept close by his side, their rivals abreast, now a trifle ahead.

Half of the distance they covered with the six almost in line, then three of the runners began lagging behind, leaving Chester Mendell and Robert leading, Billy a close third. Swifter and swifter and with unflagging energy the three pushed forward, gaining not on each other, but gradually gaining on those in the rear.

"Some sprinting, I call that," commented a strong-looking, heavy-set young man among the bystanders, as with hands thrust into his pockets he watched the race with an air of deep satisfaction. "That Mendell's making the Eros sweat, anyhow, and I'm willing to bet he's got 'em beat already."

"Not on your life," piped up a freckled-faced,

tow-headed youngster squatted below him, under the very edge of the rope. "Guess you never saw that Gibson run before or you'd know the race ain't done jest yit. That Mendell won't get anywhere near him."

"Well, how do you happen to know so much about it?" inquired the first speaker, glancing down at the youngster with a touch of condescension in his demeanor.

"Guess I've seen him try it a few times," chuckled the lad. "They're neither one of them fellows tortoisés, let me tell you."

"Maybe so, but can't you see that Mendell's ahead, and it'll take some pulling to pass him?" replied the other.

"You won in the discus throwing, didn't you?" queried the boy with a sidewise upward squint at the big fellow out of one eye, and continued as the other nodded: "Well, I reckon you better call the crowd's 'tention to that, for that's the last time your side'll win here to-day. Jist you take a good look agin 'fore you make so sure of it. Mendell's a little ahead now, but look at him. Can't you see he's beginning to get his breath hard, and look at his face! He's gettin' tired already and won't be good for much of a spurt at the finish, hear me—and 'nen look at the other fellers."

The winner of the discus throwing leaned forward over the rope and looked intently. Other bystanders, hearing the small boy's remark, looked also. Those who had taken special note of Billy's

face before, watched it again to find it still showing the same remarkable composure. With a smile he kept but a step in the rear of Robert, one eye sharply on the movements of their opponent. Bystanders who had watched more than one track race wondered and waited with increasing interest to see what he would do.

Two thirds of the way was covered, and still the same situation. Nearer and nearer they came to the goal, Robert and Chester still abreast, Billy a step in the rear. The faces of the two leaders are growing more tense, the other still smiling and unruffled. Now the end is but a short distance.

Suddenly Robert makes a quick dash forward and speeds ahead of his opponent. A ringing cheer arises from the audience. Another one follows immediately as they note Billy has moved as quickly, and like a shadow is still the same distance from his side. Their opponent makes an effort also to quicken his pace, but weakens. It is but a few yards to the goal now, and it is clear which side will win the race. At that moment Billy swings up by his friend's side and turns toward him: "We've won, Robert, we've won!" he cried in a voice that still betokened an abundance of lung power; "the Eros are the victors," and they breasted the tape together fully a dozen feet ahead of their leading opponent.

A shout from the audience went up as seemingly would rend the skies. Navy and white streamers

mingled in utter confusion, as the loyal rooters tried to make themselves heard above all others:

"Hoo-rah! Hoo-rah!  
Victory won!  
Hoo-rah! hoo-rah!  
Oh, what fun!  
Ero-delphiun."

And "Nine 'rahs for Gibson and Clayton" resounded over the campus.

"Aw! well, we don't care," drawled Guy Benson with a disgusted look, as he picked up his coat and started for the gym. "Maybe they can beat us with muscle, but we'll show 'em they can't do it when it comes to brains."

"Better not be too sure, Benson; you may get s'prised there, too," a jubilant, freckled-faced, tow-headed youngster called after him.

"Why didn't you sprint ahead of me, Billy, and come out full winner in the game?" Robert was asking Billy after the exciting scenes of the day were over and the two had reached the latter's room. "You were in fine condition and could have beaten as easily as not."

"What was the use?" responded that young man, disposing himself comfortably on the big leather couch and flipping the corner of his handkerchief at an unwary fly buzzing stupidly about in the window. "You were doing splendid, and it was fun to know that unless the other fellow steamed up considerably more than he was likely to, we'd win the race whether or no."



"But I wish you'd have shown 'em what you could do," Robert said, regretfully.

"What difference does it make, so long as our side beat, which one it was that made first?" reiterated Billy, successfully hitting his mark and disposing of the unfortunate fly in the wastebasket. "It looks well to see our president hold the honors, and I don't want 'em."

"Billy Gibson!" ejaculated Robert, with emphasis. "You know I don't want any honors unless I win 'em. If you don't make me a solemn promise that you'll do your best against me next time, I'll never enter a race with you again."

"Nonsense!" Billy scoffed, shrugging his shoulders, "there's nothing to it, I tell you. Maybe I could have beaten and maybe I couldn't. Anyhow it wasn't worth while trying. Quit your kicking. Didn't we win the race, and win together?—and—'We are brothers.'"

"Well, that's what I call a brother to a finish," Robert declared heartily, "and you won't find another instance like it in seventeen States."

"Do ring off. I'm ready for a nap," Billy commanded, stretching himself into a more comfortable position and pulling his favorite cushion over his ears to shut off further conversation. "It's been a great day."

## CHAPTER 8

## A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

THE FEW remaining days of soft, hazy October weather drifted by, followed by a blustery and cold November; December was ushered in, and the holiday time drew near.

For a week or two after the field meet the Erodelphians and Agatheans indulged in a great deal of talk with reference to an oratory contest, or debate, finally concluding that it would be well to wait until the football season was over. Later, on account of the heavy work which was being carried by several of the students from each society, upon whom they were mainly dependent, it was decided best to defer the matter until the holidays were past and the work of the first semester finished. This decision brought much relief to Robert, who was finding it a heavy strain to keep his regular grades up to the very high standard he had set for himself, and in addition carry the amount of work and responsibility he felt obliged to do in the society in helping make it a success, to say nothing of the hours he was required to be in the restaurant kitchen each week in order to enable him to meet expenses.

"Going home next week?" Billy inquired one afternoon, lazily sauntering into Robert's "skyscraper," as he was pleased to term his friend's small apartment under the eaves.

Robert, deep in the intricacies of trigonometry, looked up at first half absently, then threw aside textbook and paper, glad for a little diversion, since he had strenuously applied himself to his studies for several hours.

"Wish I could, Gibson," he replied, pushing a low stool forward for him to occupy. "Like mighty well to see the folks at home, I'll tell you; but it's a matter of dollars and cents, you know, and I've got the promise of a splendid job of work here during the holidays, so guess I'll have to take it and forego all coveted pleasures for the time being. What are you going to do? Make a trip to Dakota?"

"Not I. Don't catch me going home this time of year; might get snowed in like we were last winter for a while, and I wouldn't miss out on a week of college life for a team of horses. Seems like I've just begun to live since I came here and got fairly into things."

"Here, too," Robert agreed, heartily. "The very sight of this old hill whenever I come back from town is like an inspiration. I'm going to make a desperate effort to get through a four-year course, though it'll doubtless be in piecemeal fashion, and I'll have to deny myself lots of things and most of the little pleasures on the side that others enjoy."

"It's a confounded shame to have to skimp along that way all the time," Billy declared, leaning back against the foot of Robert's narrow bedstead and clasping both hands about one knee. "It's a pity you haven't a good Dakota farm and its products to

fall back on. It gives a fellow a mighty comfortable feeling to know it's always there ready and waiting to yield its increase and help one along in the world. Our wheat field made an average of thirty-five bushels to the acre this year; we had in several hundred acres, and dad writes me in a letter I got this morning that the market is good. Then there's the stock, of course, besides."

"It sure sounds great," Robert returned with a half sigh. "We've always had so little to get along with that I'd like to realize just for once, at least, how it would feel to be placed in such circumstances—have all I needed and plenty for extras."

"Well, I haven't forgotten altogether how it feels to be in straitened circumstances myself," said the other. "It hasn't been so many years since our family was down pretty well towards the last dollar. Then dad took a notion to go north and take up a homestead. Pioneering wasn't any fun, let me tell you, and we experienced some pretty thin living for a while, but we chanced to be among the lucky ones where everything turned out quite decently, and the last two or three years it has been comparatively easy sailing."

"And still you're not going home for Christmas?" queried Robert. "Now there's where I'd spend some money if I were in your shoes. As good as Clifton City looks to me while college is on, home looks better this time of year, and this will be my first Christmas away. I suppose the reason it looks so particularly inviting to me just now is because father



is at home, and I can't remember many holidays when he was. But it's out of the question, and I may as well not think about it."

"I've half a notion to run over to Banforth myself," Billy announced quite carelessly, as though the idea were rather a new one, and his plans yet indefinite. "Got a half uncle and a cousin or two living near there somewhere that might like to see a fellow if he'd treat 'em right," he added by way of explanation, as he tipped his stool back to a dangerous angle.

"That's dandy. Say, but you make me want to go worse than ever. We'd have a magnificent time, and I could make you acquainted with a lot of the folks."

"Let the job go and come on then. You won't miss the money ten years from now, and you'll make it through somehow. It won't cost more'n five dollars, will it?"

"No—well, the railroad fare won't, but there's always other things one doesn't count on, and five dollars look like a gold mine to me right now; besides, it isn't so much the car fare, as it is the amount I can make during the two weeks, and I have but little left for my next term's expenses—not much more than half the amount required for my tuition, to say nothing of other things needed."

"I'll loan it to you and you can pay it back next year or the year after. If you weren't so beastly independent I'd offer it to you on easier terms, but I know better."

Robert hesitated. How tempting it looked! How

much he had wanted to go he had not realized till this moment when Billy had made known his intentions! So seldom in his life had his family been at home together at Christmas time, and with Billy along things would be especially jolly.

"It does seem like when a fellow is within a hundred miles of home that he ought to be forgiven for indulging himself in a little pleasure at this season," he said, slowly. "It's 'most more than I can forego. But I must not," he added with quick decision. "Thanks to you just the same, Gibson. I don't think I'd better. I'll stay with the job while I have one. At the best I'll have to borrow some money before the next semester closes, and if I do I'll know whom to fall back on for a little loan to pull me through."

Billy did not look as disappointed as he might have done, nor in fact as he usually did when Robert refused to go with him on some pleasure excursion. He had arisen from the low seat, and stood now with hands thrust into his pockets, gazing somewhat absently out of the window at the blue, vapor-like smoke that emerged from one of the tall factory chimneys, and whistling betimes a broken snatch of college song.

"Well, when Robert says he won't, he *won't*, and that's the end on't, I suppose," he said presently.

"I'll tell you what I want you to do, though," Robert declared, earnestly. "I want you to go to our place whenever you're in town and make yourself at home. The folks will be glad to see you, and will

make it as pleasant for you as they can. And say—I'll write Ned Warren a letter and tell him to look after you a bit and see that you get acquainted. Ned's a lot younger than you, but he's all right and dandy good company, and you'll like him; and of course you're already acquainted with Miss Janey."

Billy was inclined to believe he was. He refrained, however, from making any reference to this statement, as he replied: "That'll be good of you, Clayton. I'll sure be glad to meet your father again, get acquainted with the rest of your folks, and have the letter of introduction to your friend. I'm not much acquainted with my uncle, not having met him since I was a small boy, and a fellow's relatives are sometimes uncertain in their attentions."

Accordingly Robert wrote the letter that evening to Ned, requesting him to take his place in entertaining his friend and helping to make his visit to Banforth a pleasant one. It was late when he finished, the day had been a long and wearisome one, and a tired sigh slipped out as he folded the sheets and put them in the envelope. "Billy's a lucky dog," he murmured, leaning back in his chair and closing his eyes. "Whilikens! But it's hard to stay behind and work when you know what a good time would await you if you went. But I *do* wonder why he's taken such a sudden notion to visit that uncle with whom he has a bare acquaintance. He has never spoken of him to me before, and he has relatives a short distance southeast of here that he seems to know quite well. I've heard him speak of them several times."

Nevertheless, Billy seemed quite bent on making the acquaintance of the half uncle, and took a very cheerful departure in that direction the following week. Fortune favored him, for though unapprised of the train on which his nephew would arrive, the uncle had chanced to drive with his auto to bring a small amount of produce for the market and was busy loading it upon a near-by truck when Billy stepped from the train to the depot platform. A good-natured, rough-and-ready sort of a man the elderly Mr. Gibson appeared to be, and as they spun along the smooth road in the well-built, serviceable little car toward the small, but well-stocked, well-cared-for farm some eight or nine miles southwest of Banforth, Billy learned that his cousins of this family were grown and settled on farms of their own, three in a distant State, the other in an adjoining county, and the old folks were heartily glad to have a young person come in and bring again a little of the old-time life and brightness to the lonely farmhouse.

The following day the young man rode back to Banforth on a dapper little saddle horse his uncle had told him was at his disposal, and without the slightest difficulty found his way to the little brown cottage. It will hardly be presuming too much to say that he would, in all probability, have found the place and *Ned* without Robert's letter of introduction; for tucked away in one corner of his suit case was an interesting little bundle of letters, tied together with a sentimental bit of pink ribbon,



all addressed in the small, feminine handwriting, and postmarked "Banforth." This fact he had somehow neglected to mention to any of his friends, even to Robert.

## CHAPTER 9

## AN ENEMY IN CAMP

IT'S going to be a perfectly grand Christmas!" Madeline Warren flattened the end of her dainty nose against the frosty pane as she peered out of the front sitting room window at the few scattering snowflakes drifting softly and lazily downward. It was the afternoon of the 24th of December and a slight lull had come in the hurry of preparations for the morrow in the busy household.

"Immensely splendid!" exclaimed Lu, looking up from her low rocker where she was resting and mending one of Ned's shirts. "Fact is, I can't think of adjectives big enough to express my feelings about it. But snow or no snow, it seems like a real Christmas with all of us together again, and nothing but the memory of it to remind us of our loneliness of last year's Christmastide in Janey's absence, and the unpleasant events that followed close upon its heels in Madeline's illness."

"Wonder how it is in Dakota now," said Janey musingly, pausing in the midst of her work of sorting over a bundle of school papers that had not yet been graded. "It almost gives me that old homesick feeling I had then, to see the snow falling. What a long winter it was, and yet with all that it doesn't seem possible that a year has passed since last Christmas. A year ago to-night, too, I listened for

the first time to a Latter Day Saint sermon. Drove over to the schoolhouse in the sleigh with the Farlanders. A beautiful night it was."

"And we had the Claytons here to eat Christmas dinner with us one year ago to-morrow," said Ned, from the corner where he sat fashioning some candle holders for the Christmas tree out of a few scraps of wire. "It's a downright shame Robert can't come home. He tells me in his letter that he sends his friend, Mr. Gibson, to take his place—as if anybody could take Robert's place!" and Ned twisted the wire into position with unnecessary vehemence.

"There's one thing about Dakota," Janey observed, wisely indifferent to Ned's last remark, "that's ahead of this country, and that's the sleighing. It is simply superb nearly all winter. Here, if we have a week's good sleighing in the course of the winter we think ourselves fortunate. I had more sleigh rides last winter than I've had in all the rest of my life. Wouldn't mind being there long enough to take one now if I could get right back again."

"Thanks all due to the weather and snow—none whatever to a young ranchman and his thoroughbreds and cutter," remarked Lu, teasingly. "Moonlight sleigh rides have a magical charm all their own. How about it, sister?"

"Well, of course I couldn't have had the rides unless some one had furnished the team and sleigh," Janey parried, "but," glancing out of the window and skillfully turning the subject again, "I'm equally

sure I'd have had none if there had been no more snow than usually falls here, nor than is likely to come this evening. This is but a mere flurry. See, the sky is getting lighter and the clouds are breaking already. Unless it turns much colder, this little dab will be melted, and to-morrow the roads will be dry and brown as ever."

"Well, since you are safely here with us, I, for my part, have little concern about the weather here or anywhere else," Lu rejoined. "And I'm glad of another thing," she continued. "Madeline hasn't even made the first sneeze toward a cold like she started in with last year about this time, and is a long ways from being the counterpart of the pale little spook we tucked into bed a month or so later—a bad case of pneumonia. Remedies? As I recall we dosed her with everything under the sun that people suggested—warranted sure cure for all cases—and as for poultices, it's a long list; haven't forgotten them all yet. Let me see, mustard and lard head it—one third mustard, two thirds lard (if I made one I made a dozen); flaxseed carefully prepared; onion poultice, onions fried to a crisp and strong enough to make you weep in the next room. Flannel cloths wrung out of a mixture of hot water and vinegar (half a pint of vinegar to a quart of water), the solution hot enough to scald your hands red as a lobster, likewise your patient; hot salt bags, and even two sizzling pancakes came in for their share of duty in our desperate attempts to restore lungs to good working order and our little sister to normal health."



"For mercy's sake, Lu," ejaculated Janey, while they all laughed at her ludicrous recital, "it's a wonder the poor child ever recovered at all or else wasn't burned to a blister."

"She was *slightly* blistered," Lu returned, threading her needle and throwing an indifferent glance at the small figure by the window.

"Slightly!" echoed Madeline, whirling suddenly around. "How dare you say slightly, Lu Warren? I guess you'd have thought you were about dead if you'd been in my place. I just couldn't hardly move, and I was nearly roasted all the time."

"But the blisters peeled off and in due time a new skin grew beautifully," Lu pursued with baffling calmness, "and the trouble was nicely overcome. The great difficulty about the matter since has been that we haven't known which remedy to credit with the cure. Each volunteer contributor vows it was his or her own special pet one that did the work, so there you are. I think if I had the thing to do over again I'd just mix the whole mess up into one grand plaster cast and paste her up in it."

"Lu, Lu! How you do talk!" exclaimed her mother, with a shocked expression on her serious face.

"A wee bit foolishly perhaps, mother, as your second daughter is accustomed to doing in her rattle-brained fashion; but, after all, now wouldn't that be about as sensible? Well, no matter, it's enough to know that one (or all of 'em) was efficacious, and Madeline is with us still and looks like a fresh-blooming rose in June time."

"Enough, indeed!" sighed the mother gratefully, looking fondly at the sprightly little form which had perched itself again by the window, and noting with motherly gratitude the bright eyes and pink cheeks.

"So I say," rejoined Lu, "and what matter to us whether onions or pancakes did it, so long as——"

"Who can that be?" interrupted Madeline, springing down once more in her excitement. "A stranger here, I know, and he's turning in at *our* gate!"

"Maybe it's Mr. Gibson," said Ned, hastily gathering his bits of wire and improvised holders into a paper with one sweep and hurrying to the window. "Whew!" he added, as he caught a glimpse of a well-dressed, immaculately groomed young man coming up the walk; "he's mighty spruce looking. Is that who he is, Janey? You know him, don't you?"

But the ink bottle on Janey's table had had a very narrow escape from being tipped over upon the floor, and that young lady was too busy in her search for a recreant pen to answer immediately, two incidents which the observing Lu did not fail to notice, but who for the time kept her own counsel as she whispered under her breath, "*Evidently* she does," then beat a hasty retreat to the kitchen, leaving the rest of the family to do the honors of the occasion. Thither Madeline followed a little later, having remained only long enough to satisfy her curiosity.

"He's mighty good looking." She volunteered the information in a loud whisper at her sister's ear, who, preparatory to building a fire in the kitchen

stove, was rattling the stove shaker as though her life depended upon it. It was characteristic of the girl that the more disturbed her mind, the harder she worked. "And say, he's dressed up awfully nice," Madeline added, when there was a sufficient pause between the activities of the stove shaker to give her the opportunity. "I like him."

"I don't," retorted Lu sharply, giving the grate a final turn and dropping the shaker on the floor with a thump. "He's nothing but a—a snob."

"Oh, no, he isn't either, Lu. He's nice dressed and all that, but he's not what Ned calls the 'sporty' kind. Not a bit. He's just—just jollylike. You haven't seen him yet and you don't know."

"I know all I want to," replied the sister, removing the stove lids from the top in a reckless manner, "and I simply won't like him. I just won't, so there."

"But, Lu," entreated the little sister, utterly at a loss to understand such strange behavior. "You oughtn't to feel that way about anybody. We ought to like everybody. Besides, he's come to see Ned and Janey, and he's *Robert's* friend."

"Bah! if he is, all I've got to say is Robert's a silly. He's no friend of mine or ever will be."

"Why, Lu, what is the matter?" Madeline's wide, innocent eyes searched her sister's face with a troubled look. "How do you know you don't like him when you haven't seen him?"

But without reply the girl vanished from the

kitchen and was off to the woodshed to get a basket of kindlings.

"Robert's a perfect numskull," muttered the perturbed girl, as she broke an old shingle into fine pieces. "Can't he see with half an eye that this fellow means business? If Janey *should* think about getting married I want Robert to be the one. But he doesn't deserve her if he hasn't enough sense to look out for himself."

Supper preparations were well under way when Janey appeared at the kitchen door. "Come in, Lu," she called; "you can leave things for a moment, can't you? Mr. Gibson has met all the others and is insisting on seeing Lu."

"Can't leave the supper now," retorted Lu, shortly. "The potatoes would be sure to burn, and the meat needs attention. He can wait."

"Let Madeline watch them a moment. I want you to come in," coaxed Janey.

"I won't," replied Lu, almost rudely, and with evident irritation, as she whisked into the pantry with a fresh pie from the oven.

The older sister's forehead puckered into a perplexed expression. "Poor Lu," she thought, "she's been working too hard lately and is all out of sorts. She did a lot of baking this morning. I shouldn't have left her with the supper to get to-night, but she won't let me interfere now. I'll relieve her of the burden of the Christmas dinner to-morrow and let her have a real holiday. She always carries too much."



A very short while after, the supper was ready, and a flushed little cook with an antagonistic look in her eye stood near the table as the family and their guest came in. Billy did not fail to sense on the instant the independent poise of her head, the challenge in her eyes, nor, in fact, the whole attitude so determinedly expressive of aloofness; for something of that shrewd, flashlike comprehension that was so much a part of his father's make-up, also belonged to the young man. "Some one to reckon with here," he thought, with well-disguised amusement, "and one little maiden must be made to change her opinion of me before it is all smooth sailing. See, the porcupine quills are fairly bristling."

Outwardly he was responding to Janey's introduction with charming good humor: "And this is our Lu. I've been hearing about her and been given a regular catalogue of her virtues and capabilities, first from Miss Janey last winter, and this fall from Robert, who tantalizingly regales me occasionally when I'm hungry for home cooking with a list of the tasty dishes Lu concocts. I've so much faith in his good judgment that I'm not at all averse to trying them myself."

Now what little maid with a housewifely turn could withstand so disarming a speech as that? Especially when it came from the lips of a frank-faced young man whose very countenance bespoke the fact that it rarely harbored ill will towards anyone. The phrase, "our Lu," rankled a little, but the thought of Robert's praise almost offset that. It

nearly took her breath to think that Robert had ever talked to others of her like this. The bristles lowered a little then, and in spite of her efforts and determination to push them up again and remain obdurate, very much to her own disgust and dismay as the meal progressed, Billy's diplomacy and tact were scoring a victory. And if he needed more than that evening's experience to place him in her favor, it was supplemented the following morning, a glorious, sunshiny Christmas Day, when the young man drove up to the gate in his uncle's motor car with Mamie Clayton, and insisted on the entire family, even to mother and Madeline, piling in for a long, delightful ride over the brown hills. It was characteristic of Billy to leave no one out of a good time. There were never too many around to suit his fancy, and he was always ready to dispense of the abundance of his substance as freely as he did of his good nature.

When the merry crowd came back from the long ride in high spirits, and when Lu flitted upstairs to change her dress, she was obliged to grudgingly admit to herself as she donned the big kitchen apron, "He's not so bad, after all. If it only wasn't for Robert; he likes Janey, I know, and how in the world matters will ever straighten out is more than I can tell. They're going to get terribly crisscrossed, I'm afraid."

It would have been a more difficult matter to discover and analyze Janey's thoughts than Lu's at that moment, as she paused on the porch step to an-

swer some light remark the young man called back to her as he sprang into the machine.

Glancing up again with a quick smile as he drove away, he lifted his cap and she waved her hand slightly in acknowledgment, but the remark vouchsafed to her mother as she came into the house and hung up her wraps might have been interpreted in a dozen different ways:

"I wish you could have seen Mr. Gibson last year, mother, out on the ranch. You could hardly imagine the change. It's wonderful the difference good clothes and a few months of school with its social environments will make in a young man."

## CHAPTER 10

## A SUDDEN CHANGE OF TEMPERATURE

SUCH beastly weather as you have down here in these States. You never know what it's going to do from one day to another. Never snow enough for sleighing, too warm for the ice to freeze on the lake hard enough for skating, and the roads only half fit for autoing," grumbled Billy one morning about the middle of the holiday week, when lowering clouds threatened rain and the roughness of the roads made it seem inadvisable for car service. "Now, if we were up in Dakota we'd know just about what we could depend on—good sleighing there all winter."

"Except," contradicted Janey with a bit of malicious fun in her voice, "*except* when people get snowbound and must stay indoors for days, and are obliged to tunnel to the barn and granaries so they can feed the stock, and also get out and shovel the roads."

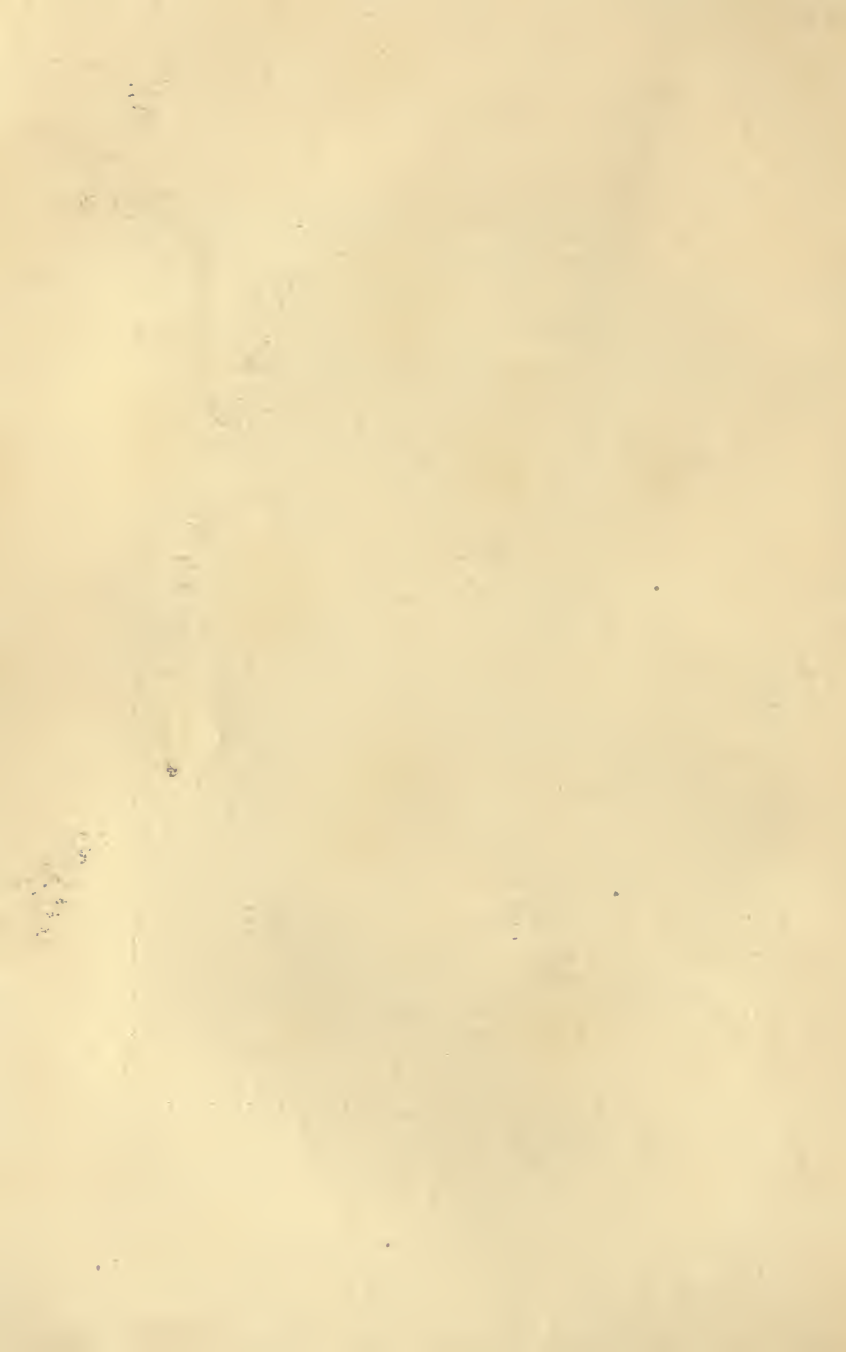
The two were alone together in the sitting room, standing by the west window looking out at the clouds and trying to decide whether it were advisable to undertake a car ride or not.

"Oh, well, there are exceptions," admitted Billy, reluctantly, "but such a storm as we had while you were up there with us last winter doesn't occur once in ten years. Honest now."





"He, however, had turned on the instant, and with body bent forward and long, firm strokes, was speeding away like the wind toward the scene of danger." (See page 109.)



"Then I most surely hit the tenth year," laughed the girl, "and I don't think I'd ever want to risk it again, even for one of those jolly sleigh rides we had last winter. I'd be afraid it wouldn't wait another decade."

"Well, I'm sure of one thing, at least, you happened in the right year, Janey, whatever the number may be," the young man declared with such a sudden plunge into seriousness that the girl was startled. "You may not realize it, but I want to tell you right now that your coming into our neighborhood last winter and your stay at our house during the time we were snowbound has changed the whole course of my life. I dimly felt some kind of an awakening in those weeks when Elder Clayton preached in our little schoolhouse—there came a new sense of duty, a weight of responsibility, a desire for better service of some kind (call it what you will, I have no words to express just what the desire may have been in its first inception), but I had never felt it more strongly than the day of the blizzard when dad and I started out to follow the excited dog and we found you struggling toward us through the storm with all those school children. I think I never witnessed such heroic courage——"

"Oh, *do* stop," interrupted the girl. "I've heard about that so many times from different ones, I never want to hear of it again. You or anyone else would have done the same thing, only ten times better. As for matters of principle, Robert's letters to us have not been entirely silent in that regard concerning you."

A slight shadow passed over Billy's face at this statement, and he gave an impatient gesture.

"But I'm going on," he continued, determinedly, "for I tell you now it is something I have never forgotten and never shall; but what surprised me still more was the moral courage you showed, when in our home you read with us the books and papers of the church and declared bravely that you were ready to take your stand on the side of right in harmony with your convictions. That's what took with mother and turned her towards the church, and made some of the rest of us think a little more than——"

"Oh, oh! please do not give me any credit for that," Janey expostulated, in real distress. "You don't know how I had fought and how I had struggled and rebelled for weeks against the truth, and how God brought me to accept it through bitter anguish and almost despair. Whatever you say, don't, *don't* praise me for any courage there. Only God's mercy and leadings through trial ever made me willing to take the course I did and——"

"I don't know anything about the struggle you went through; I only know what you did," Billy pursued evenly and in a low voice, "and I know that you had the courage of your convictions, and when I saw you bravely stepping out, so far as you knew relinquishing if necessary everything that was dearest to you in life, I thought you the most courageous girl I had ever seen. Can you imagine how cowardly it made me feel—me a big, strong, strapping fel-



low, waiting and afraid, and you a girl, younger by several years—and—and——”

“Mr. Gibson, I won’t—list——”

“Pardon me; not Mr. Gibson, but Billy, if you please; and listen just a moment longer,” with a detaining hand as she was about to hurry away. “I’ve wanted to tell you, Janey, how downright ashamed I’ve been of my own cowardice in hesitating to enter the church which I was convinced long before had the truth. You’ll never realize the influence your course had upon me. Girls never know how much of influence they hold over young men when it comes to questions of right and principle. I owe my allegiance to this faith, in a great measure, to you.”

“But I nev——”

“I must interrupt once more,” he said, looking down at her with an expression that betokened more than mere gratitude, “just to say this, that I’m selfishly hoping to win favor that your influence may always be——”

“There’s a cold wave coming from the northwest this evening, and a drop of forty degrees in the temperature before morning, which means we can have a skating party on the lake by to-morrow evening, sure as fate!” and Lu, her brown locks in wild disorder, cheeks flushed and rosy from excitement and the exercise, and breathless from a swift run up the street in order to be first to tell the news, rushed through the doorway of the sitting room with startling abruptness and dropped in a disordered heap on the first chair.

"How now!" exclaimed Billy, disconcerted only for the moment and collecting himself quickly, while Janey, glad of the opportunity, slipped out by the other door and ran upstairs to her own room. "What a breezy little forecaster preparing the way! Pray, little Miss Weather Prophet, how long has it been since you left the North Pole with this news? Whence do you come and whither do you go? Didst obtain the news from the god of wind or of storm, or from the kingdom of fairies?"

"No, from more certain quarters—Ned and the weather bureau," replied Lu, in a matter-of-fact way, brushing back the hair from before her face and looking about to see what had become of her sister. "Where did Janey go so quickly?"

"Gone to get ready for the skating party, I opine," replied the other, nonchalantly. "Since the weather bureau and its special messenger announce it in such emphatic terms it's well to begin preparations in plenty of time. You know how long it takes girls to get ready."

"Bother! Not so long as it takes some *boys* I might mention. But I thought you were wishing for cold weather this morning. You promised to take us all out to the lake if it came."

"So I did and so I shall, weather and all things favorable; I'll even take you along, Lu, which shows how forgiving I am."

"Forgiving?" with wide-eyed astonishment.

"Yes, forgiving," Billy rejoined, mischievously enjoying her bewilderment; "forgiving all, the hard

things you thought and said about me when I first came."

Lu sprang to her feet in quick anger. "I never thought Janey or Madeline would tell what I said," she exclaimed in a hurt voice.

"Wait, hold on; not so quick to jump to conclusions," Billy hastened to say. "Neither Janey nor Madeline ever told me a word about it. Rest assured of that. I thought you knew your sisters better. I didn't need anyone to tell me, for the very first evening I arrived here I knew I had an enemy in camp," and he smiled upon her quizzically.

Lu flushed and dropped weakly into the chair again. "I—I never meant to be discourteous," she said in a low voice and one that was very contrite for Lu, "but—I didn't—well, I *might* have liked you a little better if—you had come to see Ned instead of *my* Janey."

"Oh, ho! and there's the rub, with special emphasis on the *my*. Then to gain favor with you I shall visit Ned"; resting one foot on the round of her chair and regarding her with mock seriousness. "He has a letter of recommendation from Robert in his pocket. Will that help any?"

Lu straightened up and tossed her head disdainfully. "You're not one bit enthusiastic about the skating," she returned, irrelevantly. "I thought you'd be just crazy about it."

"So I was yesterday, but circumstances diverted my thoughts into other channels."

The girl gave his face such a keen, searching look

that the young man hastened to add, "Nevertheless, my little enemy, you'll see how enthusiastic and also how magnanimous I can be if that weather prediction is fulfilled; for I'll come with the car, or some other kind of rig if the roads prove too rough for it, and take the whole tribe to the lake, and I'll challenge you right now to a race across the pond."

"There comes Ned," the girl exclaimed, as the outer door of the kitchen banged in a breezy manner. "But just the same," she whispered to herself, as, her brother having entered the sitting room, she slipped away with a relieved sigh to her accustomed refuge, the pantry, "I would like to know what *they* were talking about when I came in that made them look so dreadfully serious."



## CHAPTER 11

## THE SKATING PARTY

THE PREDICTED fall in temperature did occur that night; one of those sudden changes that so often come to the Middle States in winter, and before morning the mercury hovered around a number of degrees below zero. The roads being in fairly good condition, a little rough in some places, but in the main hard and smooth, Billy, shortly after dinner, motored out to the lake from his uncle's and, after testing the ice, telephoned into town for the young folks to be ready and he would drive in for them some time during the afternoon.

Unfortunately the work at the brown cottage made but slow progress that day. Mrs. Warren felt an attack of sick headache coming on, and before noon Janey was called out to visit one of her pupils who was ill. She had expected to be gone only a little while, but the little patient, irritable and cross, begged and cried for her not to go, and the girl, though knowing the need of her help at home and inwardly fretting to get back, felt compelled to remain and soothe the restless, hysterical child into quiet, as no one else seemed able to do.

In consequence of this continued delay it was nearly three o'clock when at last she reached home. By the warmth of the sitting room fire Madeline had just finished brushing out her long, fair hair,

and braiding it into one heavy braid, and was mounting the familiar blue bow in its place when her sister hurried in. On a chair near by lay her warmest woolen dress, ready to be donned for the trip. Lu sat by the machine, some sewing on her lap, and with no signs of preparation for the skating party.

"Where's mother, Lu? and why aren't you getting ready? The boys will be here before long, won't they? I never dreamed that I'd have to be gone so long."

"Mother's head is so much worse that she had to go to bed. I can't go, Janey, for she promised to have this dress done for Sadie Flowers this afternoon, and it will take at least an hour, perhaps longer, to finish it." Lu's voice was sober, and the bright head had a downcast droop which the older sister did not fail to notice, for it was unusual of Lu to be otherwise than sunshiny.

"That's a perfect shame, Lu. I wish I needn't have gone, but when they sent for me I could hardly refuse, and it was so hard to get away from poor little Daisy. She's dreadfully cross and poor Mrs. Dennison is almost worn out. I was glad to help a little, though I did want to be home, and I'd have come sooner if I could have done so." She was hurriedly throwing off her wraps and hanging them in the little corner closet. "Now let me see what there is to do to the dress," she added, coming to Lu's side.

"Nothing very difficult at all, but it all takes a little time. Some of the seams to finish, the hooks

and eyes to sew on, and a place or two to fix about the collar," replied the younger sister, holding the dress up for her inspection. "Then it has to be pressed, of course."

"I see. Well, you let me have it now and I'll work on it while you get ready. I want you to go."

"But, Janey, this isn't all," Lu said, a trifle fretfully. "There's all the evening work to do besides—coal and wood to get in, and the dress must be taken home."

"I know, but Lu, dear, you've been counting so much on this skating party, and you're going to go out to the lake with the rest of them," declared the other with quiet determination. "You always carry the burdens, and I think you're entitled to a little play. I'm going to stay myself and look after things this time."

"Oh, no, you mustn't—I couldn't let you do that," exclaimed Lu. "And Mr. Gibson wouldn't like it, either——"

"Never mind about him; you've been having too much to do lately. Now run along and get ready, like a good girl. I simply won't go unless you can go also," she added as Lu demurred. "Hurry now, for Ned and Mr. Gibson will soon be here and you won't be ready."

Further arguments proving useless, Lu ran upstairs to do her sister's bidding; but the boys, coming in a few minutes later, raised a storm of protest against anyone remaining at home, which quite overruled every objection.

"Sure we're not going to go and leave anybody behind," declared Billy, when Janey set forth the reasons for either herself or Lu remaining at home.

"I should say not," echoed Ned. "Either we all go or we all stay; that's what I say about it."

"Oh, no, the girls would be so disappointed——"

"No need for anybody to be disappointed," asserted Billy. "As soon as Lu's ready can't you both work at the dress? Ned and I will have the wood and coal and water all in in a jiffy, and get the fires fixed so your mother won't have to get up to see about anything. We can drive around by the Den-nison's with the dress before leaving town. We'll get a little later start, maybe, but we can motor out to the lake in fifteen minutes and still have an abundance of time for a good skate before it gets very late."

And so it was arranged. From that moment the work was accomplished almost magically, and in less than an hour a merry lot of young folks, well bundled from head to foot, had crowded into the car and were being whizzed away toward Timber Lake. This lake to which the young people of Banforth resorted on occasions for recreation and amusement, was a small inland body of water that filled a V-shaped basin in the river valley several miles south and a little to the west of Banforth. It was not far from Farmer Grayson's field, and but three or four miles distant from the home of Billy's uncle. Surrounded on all sides with a thick growth of timber, it was well protected—alike sheltered from winter winds



and from summer's heat. Smooth and shining was its surface on this particular afternoon, and a number of skaters were already there when our young people arrived. With merry laughter and shouts they tumbled out of the car, ridding themselves of superfluous wraps and robes, and, fastening skates on hurriedly, were soon skimming about over the smooth ice.

An hour sped thus on swift wings, and dusk was settling heavily over the valley and lake before the young people, so intent upon their sport, realized it.

"Now for the race we were to have before we leave," challenged Billy, as, Janey having stopped to rest a little and talk with a group of girls, the young man glided up to where Lu had dropped down by the bank on one knee and was vainly trying to fasten together a broken skate strap. "Hello! what's the matter? Let me fix that for you."

"It's broken almost in two, and it's going to be too short with that piece off," Lu said ruefully. "I guess my skating's done for this time."

"Don't you believe it. We'll have that race yet; see if we don't," he replied, and off went gloves and from pocket came knife and string and a piece of leather he had been thoughtful enough to bring with him. "We'll splice that together in no time. Plenty of material here for such emergencies, and, presto change, and it's fastened together."

"Hurry up, and we'll beat both of you," called Madeline and Mamie, as hand in hand they skillfully turned the curve of the bank near the two and started off to the northward bend of the lake.

"We'll give you a fifty-yard start and then beat you," answered Billy, and called after them again in a warning note: "There's a watering hole up that way to your right, girls, by the fallen willow; better steer the other way."

"I think the girls know about it," said Lu. "I'm sure I've been warned about it enough since I've been out here."

"I think," said Billy, glancing up at the clouds and noting their lowering aspect, as well as the fast gathering darkness, "that we'd better gather our crowd together as soon as we get back from this trip across the lake and start for home. I promised your mother, you know, that we wouldn't stay late."

"It can't be very late yet, can it?" asked Lu. "It seems like we've been out here but a few minutes. It's perfectly splendid."

"Night falls so quickly, though, this time of year, and if I don't keep my word I may not get to bring you out again, don't you fear?" he inquired lightly as he put knife and the remainder of his string and leather back in his pocket and stooped to fasten the skate on firmly. "There, that will hold all right. Come on, now," and with a few quick, firm strokes they were off.

Detained longer than they had anticipated with the broken skate strap, Mamie and Madeline had gotten much the start, and the two girls, laughing and talking gayly as they left, had heard nothing of Billy's warning, as they had somehow escaped hearing it from any of the others. Unnoticed now by

the rest of the skaters, who were darting hither and thither, they had turned and were going as straight as a line for the danger point. The fast-gathering dusk half hid them in its obscurity from the two who were racing swiftly toward the goal they had set at the farther end of the lake. Suddenly a wild, terrified scream rang out with startling distinctness over the lake, followed by another and another, arresting all the skaters and turning them in the direction of the fallen willow trunk. Then the call rang out from some of the nearest and was taken up and repeated from lip to lip, "Somebody's fallen into the watering hole! Help! Help! Quick!"

Lu stopped with a cry on her lips and stood as if frozen to the spot. Was that Madeline's scream? Dazed and numb with a terrible fear she felt herself too helpless to move. She tried to call to Billy to hurry, but she could not utter a sound. He, however, had turned on the instant, and with body bent forward and long, firm strokes, was speeding away like the wind toward the scene of danger. In a second the crowd upon the lake was in confusion. Everyone was running, shouting, or screaming—everyone save the girl who remained stricken with terror. Yet most of those running were accomplishing little more than she, in their misdirected, confused efforts to help, save one calm, self-poised figure that turned neither to the right nor to the left, excepting as it cleverly swerved around those in the way. With her eyes centered on that one strong figure, so well controlled and so intent and definite on its purpose bent, she watched it pass one after another of the

skaters and enter the clear open space ahead of the confused throng.

The young man had covered more than half the distance to the watering hole before Lu could gather her scattered senses. At that moment she discerned Janey's flying figure coming swiftly around the bend from the north with the fleetness of a deer and pass in ahead of the crowd a number of yards in Billy's rear. With a last desperate effort the girl shook herself from that paralyzing numbness which had held her in its iron grip and started forward. Once moving, her skates cut the ice with remarkable precision and surety, and she gained rapidly in speed with every stroke, but her eyes still kept close watch on the fallen tree, now more plainly discernible, and the figure in the lead of the swiftly moving skaters. As the crowd surged a little to the right she saw him skate dangerously near the hole by the willow trunk, throw himself flat upon the ice near its edge, catch his feet securely around a stubby limb, and grasp quickly for an object in the dark cold waters below. Had he failed to reach it? No, she caught her breath, as she saw him hold it firmly from sinking again. Only a moment, and then others were there to help him lift the unconscious form of Mamie Clayton from the icy, treacherous clutches that had so nearly made her their victim. As they carried the limp, lifeless looking form up the embankment and began measures to restore it to consciousness, Lu noted for the first time frightened little Madeline standing by the old willow trunk, crying and screaming hysterically.



## CHAPTER 12

## THE DEBATE

WHEN William Gibson returned to Clifton City after the two weeks' vacation, there was that in his manner which indicated the holidays spent at his uncle's and among new-found friends had been very pleasant ones. Robert's eyes, as he pressed his friend's hand, were more expressive of the gratitude he felt for the rescue of his sister than were the words he tried to utter, for at least three letters, each giving a detailed account of the accident and the part Billy played in it, had been written him by members of his own and the Warren household.

"Stuff and nonsense," blustered Billy, interrupting him with an impatient gesture. "Can't a fellow take a slide and on the way grab somebody out of the water without being dubbed a hero and everybody falling over him with gratitude?"

"I know, Gibson, but just the same I want to——"

"Cut it out, Clayton. I know all you'd say, but I don't need any reward of merit for saving that nice little sister of yours, and the ten million thanks of a polite Chinaman wouldn't express your feelings; so what's the use? Save somebody else's sister and then we'll be square. Pass a good deed along, you know; that's according to the Golden Rule, isn't it? Strikes me you're looking thin. Been keeping your nose too

close to the grindstone, I'll vow. See here, you've got to let up on this and allow a little help once in a while."

Robert laughed. "The loss of a little flesh won't hurt me, I guess," he responded quite cheerfully. "But I sure had a mess of accounts to straighten out at Dyke & Simpson's store. Their bookkeeper had been ill three weeks, and such a muddle of affairs you never saw. I suppose if I were an expert bookkeeper like yourself I'd have been able to straighten it out easily; but it took me a day or two to get on to the system. However, by working all day every day and about half the nights, I managed to get things in pretty good shape. It was worth my while, too, for they paid me well, and the money will be a big help on expenses this semester. Besides, the manager told me if I ever wanted a job to let him know, and that's encouraging to a fellow who's likely to be in need of one."

"I should hope they'd pay you well," replied Billy. "A fellow that works his brains out for an institution as you do ought to be appreciated. But such a vacation! Old fellow, you can't always stand that kind of a pace."

"I'm glad I stayed, anyhow, if I did miss the good times. But tell me all about the folks and the happenings at Banforth. I want to hear about everybody."

Billy launched out in a detailed description of his uncle's home, of his visits with Robert's father and mother and sister, also of his calls at the brown cot-

tage. Of one person there only did he say but little, and of her, too, Robert was strangely silent.

With the beginning of another semester the two young men settled once more into a strenuous college life. Both were inveterate workers. Each had that which is the greatest incentive to successful work—a definite purpose in view. Billy's study hours were quite as long as Robert's and he stuck to his tasks as faithfully and thoroughly; but he held the advantages of more freedom from financial worry, from the continual harrowing thought of insufficient funds, which Robert always carried with him. As the days passed their friendship grew apace and they spent more and more time in each other's society, for when the northwest winds made Robert's poorly heated room unendurable, his books were transferred to Billy's comfortable quarters and study hours found him always there, where comfort and hospitality were alike freely dispensed.

The second and long-talked-of contest between the Agathean and Erodelphian societies took place in the form of a debate some time in the early part of March. Expressed in the free vernacular of Billy, it was a "howling success" for the Erodelphians. "And you can't accuse me this time, Sir Robert," he jocularly declared after the young man had been borne about on the shoulders of enthusiastic and exultant Erodelphians for nearly half an hour, and his praises shouted until they were hoarse, "you can't accuse me this time of giving you the honors. You took 'em off so high above my head it fairly took my

breath. Honest, Robert, I don't mind making a speech so much if I can just have it prepared beforehand, but I never could have made that rebuttal speech as you did, worlds without end. It was the grandest extemporaneous thing I ever heard. Gladstone couldn't have beaten it himself."

In Banforth, at the Clayton home as well as at the brown cottage, the excitement over the affair was almost as intense as among the members of the two societies themselves. The young folks were together nearly every day for days before, discussing the coming event and the possibilities of defeat and probabilities of victory for their friends. Frequent letters from Clifton City kept them constantly apprised of the progress the two young men were making in their preparation, and their hopes or fears for the outcome.

As the time set for the debate drew near, Ned's desire to hear it grew in intensity, until he declared if the roads were in good condition he would undertake to make the trip to Clifton City on his bicycle; for that long-coveted article was now in his possession. Janey, remembering gratefully the sacrifice he had made for the new dress she had so much wanted for her baccalaureate Sunday, had on last Christmas put in the toe of his stocking the remainder of the amount needed to purchase the wheel.

"But there's no knowing what accident might happen to you on the way," the mother said anxiously, "and the weather is so uncertain this time of year. It may turn bad at any time and the roads become



impassable. If you go at all you had better go on the train."

"But I haven't the money for that," he said, restlessly moving about from window to window. "There's no danger whatever if you only would give your consent."

"I shouldn't mind it quite so much if you were not going alone, but I should be uneasy all the time," she replied, with a worried look.

Ned did not altogether conceal the fact that he felt out of sorts over his mother's decision. "I have the bicycle and I might as well ride it," he grumbled. "What's the use of having anything if you can't get the good out of it?"

Nothing more was said till that evening when Janey met him in the little hallway upstairs and stopping him pushed a bit of crisp paper between his fingers. "Here, brother mine," she whispered, "take this and go to the debate. You made good grades all the year and you can easily get a leave of absence for two or three days from your teachers, and mother won't care if you go on the train."

Ned gave one glance at the slip of green.

"Why, Janey, I couldn't do that. Five dollars! and you and the folks need every cent of it."

"You deserve it, Ned. You've stayed at home all your life and saved and worked for us all like a man. I want you to go this once and have a royal good time. This will pay your car fare and the boys will see that you want for nothing while you are there. Besides, you have a little money that you can use if

you need it. Now don't be so conscientious that you can't take it and go and enjoy yourself. It wouldn't be right for you to go on the wheel and worry mother so, but she won't object to this, I know, because she'd like to have you go. She said as much to me and that she'd let you have the money if she had it."

Ned's spirits gave a great bound. He fairly shouted.

"I'll pay you back some day, Janey; indeed I will. You're sure good to all of us," and he bounded downstairs to tell Lu and Madeline the good news.

Two days later, having obtained the written excuse from his teachers, Ned was off for the first real pleasure trip of his life. His letter written to his three sisters and Mamie the next day after the debate was not wanting in boyish enthusiasm, though events were somewhat disconnectedly told.

"Hurrah for the Eros! Three cheers for the champions, Robert and Billy. I can't wait till I get home to tell you about it," he wrote that afternoon while Billy and Robert were attending their respective classes; "besides, the boys say I've got to stay the rest of the week and be here Sunday. There's a train leaves here Monday morning that will get me in home before noon, and I won't lose but one or two recitations, so guess I'll stay, for Robert and Billy won't hear to anything else. They're mighty good to me. Tell you, I'm lucky.

"I can't wait so long to tell you about everything, so I'm writing this down here in Billy's room while the boys are gone. Tell you it's a swell room! But

the debate—it was great, and you should have heard Robert and Billy. They sure make a splendid team. Of course Robert carried off the honors so far as the real victory was concerned. He's a natural-born orator—I heard two professors say so—and will make his mark in the world some day. Billy's not a whit behind him in a lot of things, but he can't sway an audience as Robert can. Billy knows it, too, and it would do you good to see him stand by and rejoice in the victory as much as though it were his own. He's true blue, all right.

“Then that rebuttal speech Robert made! How he ever managed to get all those telling points arranged against the arguments of the other side and put them in such a convincing way in a five-minute speech is a wonder to me yet. The audience sat spellbound. When the judges' decision was read the Erodelphians went wild. They fairly lunged for the platform and carried him all over the hall on their shoulders. They planned to carry him down town this morning, but he slipped away from them somehow.

“Say, how I wish you girls could have been here and heard it, and I wish you could see the college. I'm having the time of my life. I believe I'd be half inclined to come here myself when I get through high school, if I hadn't set my heart on Graceland College. Even this beautiful place doesn't quite banish the dream I have of our own institution.

“The boys have just come back from class, and I'm going out with them for a hike. I'll tell you everything when I get home.

“NED.”

## CHAPTER 13

## A CLOUD IN THE JUNE TIME SKY

**A**PRIL'S soft breath and gentle caresses had broken the last fetter that had held in check icebound rivers and lakes, and responding to sunshine and shower, in every nook and corner of Nature's domain, new life was astir. The last week of the month brought disappointing news to Robert from home. His father had been appointed by the General Conference for the year to the far-off mission field of Oregon. The news came to him first in a letter from his mother, who wrote it in the same quiet, uncomplaining spirit that had always been characteristic of her.

"If my mother doesn't get a reward for her labor and sacrifice in this work no one ever will," Robert declared, as having finished reading it, he laid the letter on the window sill and gazed out over the city to the distant hills. "But why," he added in a troubled tone, "in the name of all that's reasonable, did they send him to Oregon?"

His brows contracted as he meditated. It seemed to him that their home and the work in that vicinity needed his father more than any other place could need him. Was not the little band in Banforth, with the strength of many of its members yet untried, as much in need of a good shepherd as others, and were there not as many people in the surrounding country



who had never heard the gospel as there were in far-off fields? Why, then, this sudden transfer?

Evidently the change was as much of a surprise to his father as to himself and the rest, and the same questions had arisen in his mind, as Robert learned by a letter he received that afternoon. It was Saturday afternoon and he was tired of study and of the confinement in his stuffy little room. Billy had gone with a crowd up the river. The hillside of Clifton Heights was bursting into leaf and blossom and the lure of the outdoors had been calling to him all the long day. When the postman came with this and another letter, he slipped both into his pocket and answered the call. The sun shone warmly, from many a little bird throat came in rippling cadences the joy of life and hope and praise, and everywhere reigned the spirit of springtime. Robert crossed the campus and reached a secluded place not far from the birch grove. There he threw himself down on the soft, new carpet of velvety grass and tore open his father's letter. It was full of news of the business of the conference, all of which was of interest to the young man, but it was the latter part that concerned him most deeply:

"That my assignment to the new mission field was a disappointment to me," the latter pages ran, "is undeniable. I feel quite at a loss to understand how such a change can be beneficial to anyone, or can be right under the circumstances. In the past I have tried, as I am trying now, to be willing to place myself in readiness to go anywhere the Lord desired to

send me. It has almost been my creed to answer, 'I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,' but for once I find myself doubting the wisdom of this change. What surprises me still more, no one has been appointed to take my place here. There is, of course, the missionary in charge, but he will not have the time to give Banforth and vicinity the special care needed at this time, else all the work which has been done may be wasted. It seems to me that our efforts of the past year should be followed up persistently by one who is capable and wise, and it is this thought of leaving them without a shepherd, more than for myself or even our own family affairs, which gives me the greatest anxiety. I candidly admit I cannot see the wisdom of allowing the work to lapse here while I must run away off somewhere to open up new fields which will perhaps be left in the same way a year hence.

"Forgive me for writing in such a strain. I believe I have never before in all my life written like this to you. It sounds like I was losing faith, and I fear lest I shall be putting doubts into your mind, and yet somehow I feel as though I needed your opinion in this matter to help me get straightened out again. You are wise and capable beyond your years, Robert, with a keen insight into spiritual matters, and almost unconsciously, I discover, I have begun to lean on your judgment and the strength of your youth. Down deep in my heart, I can assure you, there is a feeling that all will be directed right, though things are so exactly opposite just now to that which my reason and wisdom dictate.

"I sincerely hope the change will not seriously interfere with your affairs; for it is one of my great desires that you may have that which I have never been able to get—a college education. It has brought me great pleasure and satisfaction to learn of the good work you have done this year. I have had to make my way through without even the advantage of high school work, and this has seriously handicapped me at times, yet God has blessed me in abundance and his Spirit has been my teacher in the hour of need. It has taken hard work and much study on the side to get hold of the necessary things in an educational way that would make me more efficient in my labors, for I do contend that every minister for Christ should be a constant and earnest student of all good books and of nature and life, and I have tried to use every opportunity to improve myself that the Lord might not find me a useless instrument.

"However, I need not write further now. As soon as you get home we can talk everything over, your plans for the coming year, etc. In the meantime I'll get the garden made and do some repairing about the place. I shall not leave until the latter part of June, and this will give me a week or two at home after your return. Would be glad if I knew of some way to arrange so you would not be embarrassed for lack of funds next winter as you have been this one. But, as in the past, where we cannot see our way clearly, we shall have to trust the One who ever provides for the needs of his children, and who cannot

fail to lead us aright if we are willing to seek direction from him.

“Eagerly awaiting your return home, I am

“Affectionately your father,

“RICHARD CLAYTON.”

Robert placed the letter away in his pocket, stretched himself upon the soft turf, and gave himself up to meditation. Around him the breeze stirred softly. Somewhere above him amid the green boughs a pair of gentle-voiced doves were cooing softly and trying to decide if the old tree were a suitable and proper place to establish their makeshift nest. A few bees winged their way past him with drowsy hum. Everywhere about him nature was stirring with the newborn life and activity that actuates her after her long season of rest and sleep. The young man let his eyes wander dreamily to the valley with its thickset growth of forest trees. Somewhere down there below the foliage of heavy underbrush he knew a little stream rippled along the narrow valley, through one end of the town, and emptied itself into Silver River. Up the larger valley to the northwest he could easily discern the outlines of the river, winding its way along toward Clifton City. Again and again it seemed to start forward in a direct course, only to be turned aside by cliff or embankment. Would his own life's way be as uncertain as the course of this stream? he wondered. Must it be constantly obstructed by insurmountable obstacles?

For some weeks past Robert had ceased to entertain hopes of coming back to Clifton College the next



year. He had been careful all along to conserve his funds and make them reach as far as possible. He had worked during all his spare moments between hours of school and evening hours of study, but with this steady effort he had found his funds insufficient. For the expenses of the latter part of the semester he had been obliged to obtain a small loan to enable him to finish the year's work. He had taken Billy at his word and in his strait had turned to him. But Robert felt he could not infringe on his friend's generosity by asking for any more when he had nothing whatever to fall back upon with which to secure payment; and to start in for another whole year at college with only what he could earn during the summer vacation looked extremely hazardous, to say the least; for if he failed or anything happened to him, his debt would be left for his parents to pay.

With these stern facts pressed upon him, a few days before he had written to trustees of two or three of the rural schools near Banforth, inclosing applications. That the other letter, still unopened in his pocket, was from one of these he knew well enough, yet he felt in no hurry to find out whether they had accepted or rejected his terms. Without question, it was clear to him now, he *must* teach, but it mattered little to him at this moment where.

Slowly at last he drew the letter out and opened it. It proved to be from Farmer Grayson and contained the information that he had presented Robert's application to the other members of his district

board and believed they were looking with favor upon his proposition. As for himself and wife, they were delighted at the prospect.

"That's encouraging," he declared, rather half-heartedly, as he finished the brief, pencil-scrawled pages, and his eyes again meditatively sought the valley and winding course of Silver River. "I think the Elm Creek School would be my choice of the ones I applied for. A mile from Farmer Grayson's and five miles from town. I could walk home during the nice weather in the fall, and his home will be a good place to stay in the winter."

Not many weeks later and the college year was closing, with its usual round of social events and commencement work, and Robert and Billy were bidding good-by to classmates and friends. As alone the last evening in his little room Robert packed his books in his trunk, filling in the vacant spaces with the few clothes that composed his wardrobe, he looked wistfully about at its already deserted appearance, and wondered with a half homesick feeling if he would ever come back again. He was already behind most of his comrades in leaving, for the chance of a few days' work in the store where he had done bookkeeping during the holidays had promised means to defray his expenses home. Even Billy had gone. That young man had taken his departure—not for Dakota, but for Banforth, with the explanation that his uncle had a little business he wished him to see to before he left for the north, and also had a good position in view for him. So it happened

that on this evening and the following morning when Robert was ready to leave Clifton City Heights the place was deserted of college students and it wore an air of quiet repose strangely unlike the scenes of activity that had characterized it for months.

He rose early that morning, just as the gray of early dawn was dissolving before slowly spreading crimson tints and purplish shadows, and walked out over the hill to watch, from his favorite rock on the edge of the great cliff, the sun rise one more time. But scarcely had he reached the place when a dull leaden cloud unfurled itself across the eastern sky, shutting completely from view the marvelous beauty of a sunrise that was one of the boasted glories of Clifton Heights. With a feeling that he had been unreasonably denied something very dear and sacred that should belong to him in these last moments on the hill of his dreams, Robert turned away and walked slowly to the railway station, reaching it an hour earlier than necessary. He was grateful that, as the train at last sped out of the town and away among the hills, the clouds lifted a little and, looking back, he could discern once again the outlines of the college hill and the tall smokestacks of the city.

Once out of sight of the place, his eagerness to reach home increased with every mile traveled. Wrapped in the thoughts of good-byes to his friends and regret at the thought of not being able to come back another year, he had not until now realized how welcome was the thought of home. This eagerness increased till by the time the train steamed into Ban-

forth he could scarcely wait for it to stop moving. Because of uncertainty as to the time when he would be able to get away, he had not written them what day he would reach home; but for the past two days either his father or his sister Mamie, in anticipation of his arrival, had met every train, and she was there now, wildly dancing about on the depot platform, her quick eyes having been the first to recognize him as he stood on the car steps.

As might be suspected, at the first opportunity that afternoon he slipped away and turned his steps toward the brown cottage. Passing again on his way the little railway station, there flashed vividly to his mind remembrance of the chance occurrence of a little more than a year ago which had brought about his first meeting with Janey Warren. He remembered bits of their conversation as he passed along the familiar street, and recalled again her eager, glowing face when they had turned the corner by the cottage and as together they had stolen along the hedge, quietly, so they might make her arrival a complete surprise. He paused a moment at this very corner now, the memory of that day fresh in his mind. The clouds of the early June morning had lifted and passed away. The soft fragrance of the roses drifted to him from the corner of the garden. At the wren box the tiny birds were as busy as ever with their homekeeping, perhaps the very identical pair that had been there the year before. The blue peacefulness of the sky and the sweet serenity of the atmosphere bespoke already the lazy stillness of summer time.



All at once a shrill honk broke upon the quiet air with its abrupt signal, as a swift-flying motor car rounded the corner of the other street a bit perilously and brought itself to a sudden standstill before the front gate of the little brown cottage. Robert started forward, then for some unaccountable reason drew back in the shadow of the great maple as a very familiar, lithe, athletic figure sprang out of the car and ran lightly to the front door and went in. With a sudden premonition the young man stood perfectly still and waited. A moment later Billy and Janey emerged from the cottage and came down the walk talking and laughing, with the apparent freedom and understanding of a well-established friendship, and Robert, standing back unnoticed in the shadow of the tree, silently watched them enter the car and drive away.

As in his experience of the morning on Clifton Heights, when the crimson splendor of the dawn had been darkened and shut away from him, so now he became suddenly conscious that across life's June time sky there had drifted a threatening cloud, making the future portent with shadows.

## CHAPTER 14

## "A FOOL IN THE FOREST"

WITH THE sensation of one having experienced a sudden and unexpected loss, Robert stood perfectly still until the motor car had whirled away with its two occupants and passed out of sight in the distance; then, instead of going into the cottage, he turned and walked away under the shadow of the elms, crossed the street a block below, and turned again with scarce a conscious thought of the direction his footsteps were tending, but going directly, nevertheless, toward the wooded ravine where he and Janey had wandered so many times the summer before, and which now offered him the seclusion and quiet he most desired.

Without any interruption he reached the outskirts of the town and followed the winding path that led to the cool, restful retreat by the spring. On the low embankment just above it grew a little knot of wild crab apple trees, and beneath them Robert dropped down on the soft turf and gave himself over to sober reflection, to an analysis of his emotions, and to a review of events which had led up to the present situation.

"In the name of common sense, what's the matter with me?" was his first wrathful declaration, as he leaned carelessly back against one of the stubby little trees and idly plunged his pocketknife into a half



“That so? The plans must be far-reaching,” suggested Robert, looking up with frank admiration at his young friend, standing so straight and slim and determined before him.” (See page 140.)





disclosed root that zigzagged along the surface of the ground. "And that crazy Gibson ought to have better sense than to think—" He paused. Light was dawning in his mind, very perceptibly disclosing the motive for a number of Billy's actions that Robert had never quite accounted for. In the first place he had always wondered why Billy had elected to come to Clifton City College the winter before when there were just as good and even better schools of its kind much nearer his own home—places, too, where he had either relatives or acquaintances living who had offered him special advantages if he would but come. By chance Billy had mentioned this, but he had never given any particular reason for his choosing the college he did.

Then there was his visit to Banforth at the holiday time, which had puzzled Robert. Other things, in a small way, too, had occurred which had made him wonder, and lastly there had been his undue impatience to leave the moment college closed and get back to Banforth to attend to that important business for his uncle. It was all clear enough now—these events, coupled with Billy's always noncommittal statements with reference to the inmates of the brown cottage, and especially of Janey, and with a sinking heart Robert recalled to memory the exceeding good spirits with which the young man had returned from his vacation. His mind leaped forward at once to the possibilities. Could it be, he wondered, that matters had already been settled, and that before he had become fully aware of the state of his

own feelings towards Janey, another had slipped in, and he was but waking from his all absorbing dreams and ambitions to find her gone forever?

There followed this revealment quick, jealous thoughts. Had Billy discovered Robert's regard for the girl even before he had been fully aware of it himself and purposely set about to defeat him? he questioned. Under the guise of friendship had he kept thus silent and secretly connived to make that friendship a barrier to his advances? A hundred questions and suspicions like these flashed through his brain, a multitude of mingled emotions—anger, pride, jealousy, envy, pain—surged through his heart. For a little while hatred and its kindred passions gained the ascendancy. Then came shame at the thoughts and feelings so unworthy of himself and of his friend. With it came the calmer feelings natural to one who has always been accustomed to reason closely and weigh well before passing judgment. Carefully he went back over everything since their acquaintance. The first link in the chain of evidence which vindicated his friend was the fact that when Billy had chosen to come to Clifton City College he scarcely knew even of Robert's existence, if at all, much less his personal affairs, and since they had met, so far as any action or expression of his was concerned, Billy could never have had any reason to suspect they would be rivals.

With this saner and more kindly reasoning, was the dismissal at once of suspicious thoughts and a renewal of confidence in his friend. Well he knew that

frank, open-hearted, generous Billy would never stoop to an unprincipled act to win his way. It must ever be an open field and a fair game. Every act of his that year had manifested strictly honorable principles. On the other hand, Robert was keenly aware, sensed fully, that in this new development of circumstances, the young man who had swung up to his side in the half-mile race and so freely allowed him first honors, would in nowise hold back and wait for him in this instance. They would stand as man to man, and Billy would run to win. Robert would think less of him if he did not, and would not wish it to be otherwise.

But as he reviewed matters further, he soon saw that there were barriers in the way of his entering into an even race. The odds were against him, and he could see in a trice the unhappy situation in which he was placed. In every way he was indebted to his friend. All the year through his warm room and abundance of books had been at Robert's disposal—as free as the air dispensed by nature. Billy had oftentimes, as in that memorable half-mile race, accorded him first place in the honors, and unselfishly gloried in his victories and triumphs. Again, he had risked his life to save the little sister, as he still fondly called her, whose artless companionship and tender affection had been a great factor in his boyhood life and whose confidence in him was still a support and stay. Last of all, he recounted, there was the loan which Billy had insistently made him, without note or interest. Surely there was nothing left

for him to do. No way he could move and move honorably.

And as if Fate had left nothing undone in her attempt to thwart his hopes and purposes, she held up before him now a contrast. Were it possible to sweep away all these other obstacles, these barriers that had so suddenly reared themselves before his mind, and there remained an open field to enter, what had he to offer in return for the gift he asked? Nothing, he told himself; worse than nothing. At present, debt, and a life of toil, privation, possibly hardship and sacrifice if—he paused here as he always paused when that thought was forced upon him—if the words spoken to him in the prayer meeting the year before were of import and he should be called to occupy in the ministry of the church as his father had been. He had reluctantly conceded in his heart months ago that they were true and that he should prepare for that service, but with all the experiences of his own past life before him, and many of his mother's, he knew what it would mean to the girl who might consent to share the future with him. No handsome, trim built motor cars would be his to offer, like the one which had gone whirling away from the brown cottage less than an hour ago through the sweet-scented air of the bright June afternoon. An occasional ride in a serviceable little roadster would be the best he could hope to provide, perhaps not even that, and it would be years before he could earn sufficient for a home.

And the other—what had he to offer? Everything



—pleasure, happiness, wealth, the power to place in her possession all the beautiful things of life in which the heart of a woman delights; and, for his own part, one capable, as Robert verily believed, of as true-hearted love and devotion as any woman might wish, and as only an honorable and true man can offer. He was forced to admit this, even though for the moment he would have been secretly glad if it were not so, and thereby some of his scruples be removed.

There came then in the wake of all this revelation a fuller and clearer sense of his loss. Weeks before when the decision had been made that he could not return to college the coming fall, there was a very tangible, comforting thought in looking forward to the associations the year at home would bring, a pleasant compensation for his sacrifice. Shocked was he now to discover further that nowhere in the long future which stretched ahead of him had he left her out of his plans, but that her sympathy and companionship had been woven into all his dreams.

Robert sighed audibly, and leaning back against the scrubby tree again, drew his cap low over his forehead and closed his eyes, shutting out the bright sunlight and beauty of a world all out of harmony with his own gloomy thoughts. For a long time he sat thus, hands thrust into his pockets, his brain reviewing the entire matter over and over again, each time finding new difficulties for himself, and each time discovering new points of vantage for his friend.

"I'm a fool, that's all," he at last declared audibly, "a downright miserable fool, and no mistake. Luck never comes my way—but I wish I had the year to live over again."

"'A fool, a fool! I met a fool i' the forest,  
A motley fool; a miserable world!  
As I do live by food, I met a fool;  
Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,  
And rail'd on Lady Fortune in good terms.'"

A clear voice broke the quiet around him at this moment, trilling out this apt quotation, from the lines of "As you like it," with an abruptness startling the young man so perceptibly as to cause his cap to fall forward upon the grass and roll down the embankment. It escaped a plunge in the waters of the stream below through the medium of a quick brown hand thrust out to impede its progress. The same hand raised it and placed it atop of her own mass of rumpled locks, while the other still held securely across one arm and shoulder long sprays of the wild rose vine filled with fragrant pink blossoms.

"Lu Warren, you'd startle a dead man out of his grave," Robert declared testily, somewhat disconcerted and vexed at this sudden shaking up of his thoughts, and looking rather blankly down at the blithe little figure on the ledge of rock below him. So intense had been his feelings that it seemed to him for a moment his whole heart and thoughts had been revealed to the world.

"Oh, I would, would I? You are mistaken, Sir Knight. I can be accused of doing nothing more

miraculous than startling a fool out of his folly, and rescuing his cap at the same time from a watery grave."

"Startling him in his folly, would be nearer the truth than out of it, I imagine," Robert replied, getting up from his cramped position and beginning to descend to the ledge of rocks where she stood.

"A nice way for you to act when you come home from college," she chided. "Fall into a spell of the dumps first thing and go moping off somewhere without coming to see your friends. Dear me! I have no use for an education if that's all it does for one. Here we've just been pining around for the last week to see you, and Ned fairly had a spasm when he heard at dinner that you'd come in on the morning train. He rushed right off at once on the hunt for you, but lo—you had vanished, and——"

"And you alone have been successful in the search," Robert finished, stepping down upon the rock beside her and transferring the cap from her head to his. "Thanks for the heroic act of rescue. I'm doubly grateful since it's a new one."

"Yes, I found the wild roses I was looking for," Lu answered, indifferently, sniffing at the fragrant blossoms with unfeigned admiration, "and then, too, in my wanderings after them I discovered a—a—fool, according to his own statement."

"And according to others' opinion as well, I dare say, if politeness permitted them to give expression to their thoughts."

"A fool did I say?" Lu queried, shifting her

weight to the other foot and studying his face with mock seriousness. "Nay, I have erred in judgment; for this strange creature speaketh wisdom. Mother always avers, and repeats the proverb on occasion to a too sagacious son or daughter that ' 'Tis the fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knoweth himself to be a fool.' "

"A useful proverb, no doubt," said Robert, with a twinkle in his eye; "one worth remembering. But now do you suppose Ned has returned by this time?"

"How should I know?" queried the girl, giving him one of those customarily shrewd glances, as was her wont when he asked for her brother. "It's more than probable that he's still frantically running to and fro searching for one of the lost sheep of Israel, or a stray collegiate roaming about in the wilderness. Think of it! A perfect June afternoon like this! How a man can get moody and sour on such a day is past my comprehension."

"All well enough so far as the day is concerned, but a fellow's state of mind doesn't always hang on the weather."

"Then you must be hungry. Haven't they been feeding you well? Say, you do look thin. I'll take you home and give you something to eat. How's strawberries and cream, for instance?"

"Sounds even better than blackberry pies. Will you accompany them with a sermon?"

"No. I told you last summer, in the blackberry patch, I'd preached my last sermon. I'll never attempt another unless it's on a heathen. 'A prophet is not without honor—' you know the rest."



"A preacher must not work for praise or honor," Robert declared. "Haven't you learned that fact yet? But strawberries and cream sound pretty good to me, and perhaps we had better end Ned's fruitless search. Shall we be going?"

He offered an assisting hand to help her from the rock and across the gurgling water of the ravine, which recent rains had swollen to the proportions of a small creek; but the girl only laughed in childish scorn of his proffer and went skipping across the rocks with the lightness and surety of foot born of a life of activity and freedom.

As the two neared the street which ran past the brown cottage Billy and Janey were just returning from their ride, and by the time they reached the gate the car with its one occupant had gone and Janey had entered the house. Ned, working at the fence of the pasture lot which bordered that edge of the town, saw and hailed them, and Robert turned into the by-street and went down to where he was.

Lu went thoughtfully into the kitchen to fill vase and bowl with cool water and arrange her sprays of pink beauties. She had already surmised the trouble that was brewing, and thought she discerned a reason for Robert's downcast spirits.

"Well, I said last winter he was a fool, but he's been a long time finding it out. Billy's ahead, from all appearances, and the outcome looks mighty dubious for poor Robert."

"My, how lovely those roses are!" exclaimed Janey, coming leisurely into the kitchen at that moment,

"and such a lot of them, too. Shall I help you arrange them?"

"Surely. This vase is such an awkward shape, I wish you'd arrange some for it. I never can get them to look as artistic as you do. This one suits me better. Look! isn't this vine a beauty?"

"Lovely," replied the older sister, half absently sorting over the mass and selecting some of the smaller sprays for the receptacle in question. "Who was that coming along the street with you, Lu?" she queried after a moment, in an indifferent manner.

Neither the tone nor the indifference escaped the wise Lu, as she answered quite carelessly: "When? Oh, just a little while ago do you mean? Why, Robert, of course. Didn't you recognize him? I'll admit he's changed some, but not enough to require an introduction. These colleges always put a sort of shine on that agrees with some, while with others it doesn't exactly harmonize. Guess those are the ones that only get a little smearing over the surface and it doesn't run deep. Robert isn't that kind."

"Why didn't he come in?"

"Stars and stockings! how am I to account for a man's notions? What merely feminine persuasion do you suppose could prevail upon him, with Ned in sight down at the pasture fence? I even offered him strawberries and cream, and, thin as he is, he never stopped to think of it again after discovering the whereabouts of Ned. Did you ever see two such cronies?"

Janey made no answer to this interrogation, but

the twig she was trying to bend to the proper angle snapped at that instant and she cast it aside to look for another more to suit her fancy.

"I suppose they'll be in soon," she commented after a few moments, and, seeming suddenly to have lost interest in the wild vines and blossoms, turned and left the room.

"I do declare to goodness what a bungle she has made of that bouquet!" exclaimed the girl as soon as her sister had disappeared through the doorway and her steps could be heard ascending the stairway. "I'm not an artist, but I'll vow I can beat you this time. Well, never mind, but run along, sister mine," she soliloquized, "you can get a good view of the corner of the pasture from the north window upstairs." If 'twas anyone else on earth but you I'd say it served you right."

Whether Janey made use of the vantage point which had suggested itself to her sister's mind must be left to conjecture, since the door to that room was closed when Lu went through the hall a short time later, and even her intrepid courage failed to investigate. Nevertheless Robert did not come back. The long sunny hours passed swiftly to him and Ned as they visited in the shady corner of the pasture lot, and work and care for a time were almost wholly forgotten.

"I can hardly believe it," Ned declared after they had talked for a time, "that I am so near through high school. In my circumstances what a mountainous task it looked to begin with. Now only another

year remains and when I get through with it I'll be just as anxious for college work as I was for this—and I'm going to get it, too," he added with determination. "I used to think," he laughed, "when I was small, that if I ever got a high school education I'd be perfectly satisfied. Now it seems like I've only made a start."

"Going to begin right away as soon as school work is finished?" Robert inquired with unfeigned interest as he sat on a huge stump, diary in hand, to which he had been making frequent references as they talked.

"If I can. It seems to me it's the quickest way to help the family. I'd like to take a course in stenography first and use it to earn my way through."

"And where do you expect to go? Is the heart still set for Graceland as it was a year ago?"

"Yes, I think it shall be Graceland. I've somehow never felt that it could be any other place, since I came into the church. It sort of fits into my plans better," he added.

"That so? The plans must be far-reaching," suggested Robert, looking up with frank admiration at his young friend, standing so straight and slim and determined before him.

"I ought not to mention them yet; they're not matured enough," Ned said, slowly. "I've never spoken of them before—" he paused, "but I will tell you, Robert, because I know you won't laugh at me. I used to think before I joined the church that there was only one way of service, that is, you know



what I mean, which counted as real service to the Lord. I have a different viewpoint now. One kind of honorable work is as acceptable as another, provided it's the thing He wants you to do. I have no great talent. I belong to the mediocre sort; I could never be a speaker as you are, nor a shining light in the church as you will some day be; but I made a solemn covenant when I was baptized to give Him the best I am capable of. My ambition lies along the line of teaching. I like it better than anything else. The few times I have acted as substitute for some of the grades here in our school has made me sure of that. Graceland was built for the young people of the church. She always needs financial aid; but she needs as well the support and help of the young people, and those who are willing to sacrifice for her sake. I shall go there and receive of her benefits, and when I have qualified myself shall in turn offer my services."

"Ned, this is great. You make me ashamed of myself. You are far more willing to give of yourself than I have been. It seems to me there is no broader field than that of a teacher. I'd like it myself. I hope you'll be able to carry out your plans, and if you do, our Graceland College will be the richer for your having been its benefactor. Some of the rest of us selfish ones would not have thought of it. We think only of what we get, forgetting what we should return."

"It's been away down in my heart all these months," Ned went on. "As you may imagine, it's

far from what I planned years ago. I want to help mother and Lu and Madeline, and pay Janey back for some of the help she has given me, and if we are comfortable that's all I want. My dreams used to be for lots of money and great positions. That doesn't appeal to me any more. I've never had much money, so guess I won't miss it. By the way, that makes me think of Billy's good fortune. Have you heard of it?"

"No, I haven't," replied Robert, his spirits sinking as a gloomy shadow of misgiving overcast him. "What is it?"

"His uncle has secured for him the position of assistant cashier in the Banforth Savings Bank and he begins work next Monday. Did you ever see such a lucky fellow?"

*"Never!"*

## CHAPTER 15

## THE BATTLE UNDER THE STARS

THE SUN was dropping low in the west, its last beams touching only the tops of the taller trees in the pasture lot, and the shadows were momentarily growing heavier over the long, cool tangled grass and scrubby undergrowth, when at last the two youths searched out their own docile-eyed Jerseys from among the small herd that daily browsed in the pasture, and drove them out into the lane. Here again they loitered to rehearse another and still another incident of the past year before they finally separated and turned their steps toward their respective homes. It was almost dark when Robert came driving the sleek little bossy up the alley to the back of the lot and found Mamie perched on the top of the yard gate, milk pail in hand, impatiently awaiting his return.

"Where have you been all this time, Robert? I thought you'd never come." She had sprung down from her perch and ran to open the gate as she assailed him with this sisterly reproof in a hurt tone the young man was quick to detect. "We have seen you scarcely at all to-day. I suppose you've been at the brown cottage, but you might have let me go with you the first time. Don't you realize that you have been away from us nearly ten months?"

"It's a downright shame, Mamie, to run off as I

did, but you and mother were busy, and I really had no intention of staying so long. You shall go with me next time," Robert replied, as he drove the cow into the lot and to the narrow milking stall. "However," he added a trifle bitterly, as he closed the gate and pulled the milking stool down from its place on the fence, "I *wasn't* at the brown cottage this afternoon. Started there, it is true, but got sidetracked. Saw Lu a little while, then met Ned, and we had a long visit together down in the pasture lot. We must have started out with our cows nearly an hour ago, but couldn't get through talking. But never mind, little sister, I'll be home all the year, and there'll be heaps of time to tell you everything that's happened since I went away, and you mustn't mind my running off to hunt up all my old friends whom I haven't seen for such a long time."

"Of course it's all right," Mamie returned, much mollified at this, "but you've been gone so long I'm a bit jealous of every friend who claims a minute of your time on this first day. You can't imagine how hard it has been for mamma and me sometimes while you were away, and it's so glorious for you to be home again I can't think of anything else. Besides, you know, our daddy will soon be gone for a whole year again, and he wants to be with you all he can before he leaves," she added, climbing back to her former position on the gate, and watching him through the dim light as his strong hands sent the milk into the pail in steady, abundant streams.

"That's true," her brother replied, "and I'll hurry



with the milking so we can have a good talk yet this evening, and the rest of this week he shall have all my thought and time if he wants it. Has he fully decided to go next Monday, or do you think we can persuade him to stay a little longer?"

"Our daddy has set the time for Monday, Tuesday at the very latest, and you know how he always is when he's once made up his mind," replied Mamie. "He gets restless, feels that he is needed in his field, and that it is his duty to be there. I think he'll go then, but he wants a talk with you this evening, and was disappointed when you didn't come home earlier."

"There are a lot of things I must ask him about before he goes. For my part, I can't see what we are going to do without him here in the church work. Has anybody been provided for us yet?"

An answer did not come immediately. With her arms clasped tightly around the tall post at the gate's side, and her chin resting on the top, the girl sat intently gazing upward at the vast firmament above.

"There is nothing definitely settled, I believe," she spoke slowly after the pause, as if her mind were afar off, "and we don't know just what will be done. Do look up at the stars, Robert! Did you ever see so many in your life? The big bear I never could trace, but do look how bright the seven sisters are! Surely as said Tennyson, they do 'glitter like a swarm of fireflies tangled in a silver braid.' The sky to-night is like—like—oh, I wish I were a poet and could make beautiful comparisons——"

"As for instance," began her brother teasingly,

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are,  
Up above the world so high,  
Like a diamond——"

"Oh, Robert, you spoil all my sentiment with your silly little ditty," exclaimed the girl, springing down again and trying to shake his strong shoulders which were bent to their light task.

"Look out! You'll make the cow kick the pail and us both over if you're not careful; then there'll be another milky way, and we'll see stars without looking at the heavens—myriads of them. I thought it was poetic comparisons you wanted," Robert replied, balancing himself once more on the milk stool and proceeding with his work as she released him.

"So it was—and not a nursery rhyme. Indeed, do you realize that I am not such a little sister as I once was? I'm in high school, finished junior year, if you please, and I'll listen to nothing less than Shakespeare or Tennyson."

"Oh, ho! Listen to the conceit! Hardly shall I be able to satisfy such demands, for on the spur of the moment I can recall nothing but a single sentence from Shakespeare in one of my old grammars,

"Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

"How's that?"

"Not good at all. It doesn't fit the occasion. 'Night candles' are getting brighter every minute."

"Very well, then, will a quotation from Byron satisfy? Here's this:

"Ye stars; which are the poetry of heaven,  
If in your bright leaves we would read fate  
Of men and empires—'tis to be forgiven,  
That in our aspirations to be great,  
Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,  
And claim a kindred with you; for ye are  
A beauty and a mystery, and create  
In us such love and reverence from afar,  
That fortune, fame, power, life, have named themselves a star."

"Wonderful, and perfectly in harmony with a night like this," she applauded, watching at the same moment with an absorbed gaze for the reappearance of a tiny far distant star which flashed out now and then but dimly. "Have you any more like that?"

"All heaven and earth are still—though—not in sleep," continued the brother,

"But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;  
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep:—  
All earth and heaven are still: From the high host  
Of stars, to the lull'd lake and mountain coast,  
All is concenter'd in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
But hath a part of being, and a sense,  
Of that which is of all Creator and defense."

"Will that suffice?" he asked as he finished the stanza and the milking at the same time and rising, gave the stool a toss, back to its place on the fence. "Assuredly little sisters do grow up, don't they?" he exclaimed in some surprise as he stood beside her

and measured her height even with his shoulder. "Why, Mamie, you've surely grown a lot in the last year. Do you expect to be as tall as your big brother?"

"Never. I can't hope to compete with him in size, physical or mental, ever, but I intend to let him know that I always expect to claim a part of his time and attention."

Robert laughed, caught up the pail with one hand, his sister's arm with the other, and together they went to the house, his mood happier, his spirits comforted.

They kept up a gay little conversation at the supper table, the brother and sister, and if Robert even noticed the shade of anxiety which rested on his mother's face, and the fact that his father was unduly grave, and both unusually quiet, he would have thought nothing of it, for the time of his father's departure was fast approaching, and he would easily have attributed it to that. But as they arose from the table Mr. Clayton spoke to him in his customary mild manner, yet with a touch of gravity which struck Robert with import:

"I received a letter a day or two ago, my boy, from the missionary in charge of this section of the country. He will be here next Saturday, he says, to arrange with regard to the work in this place for the coming year during my absence in the West. His letter concerns important matters and I would like you to read it."

Robert felt a sudden chill of dread and misgiving



pass over him. He paused a moment before replying:

"Has he arranged for anyone to come, and is he some one we know? I hope he can send us somebody who can be here most of the time."

"He has some one in mind, I believe," replied his father in a deliberate manner. "You can judge when you read his letter as to whether you will be satisfied with his arrangements and the suggestion he makes as to the individual he expects to take charge. Perhaps we had better go into the sitting room. Here is the letter."

Mrs. Clayton and Mamie in silence began clearing the table, and the mother with hands a trifle unsteady stacked the dishes in order at the sink. The two men passed into the adjoining room where Mr. Clayton sat down on the couch, and Robert, dropping into a rocking chair, took the letter from its envelope and read:

*"Dear Brother Clayton:* Since the appointments made at the General Conference, and your consequent assignment to the West, the providing of a man to take charge of the work in your home town and vicinity has been constantly upon my mind. Your explanation of affairs as they exist at the present time, and the specific needs and demands, have caused me to give the matter special and prayerful attention. I placed my hand here and there in the hope of finding a man whom I could send to your district, but was disappointed in every respect—each and all seemed to be needed more in other fields. Up until last night I had found no available man, and as

yet had received no special direction of the Spirit as to what should be done.

“Early this morning, however, as I lay awake thinking it over, there came clearly to my inner consciousness a manifestation of God’s will concerning the work you have asked me to look after; also there was plainly pointed out to my mind the man who should take charge of it.

“With regard to this individual, you will remember when I name him, that I have had but little personal acquaintance with him—none of late years. A few years ago, when he was but a boy fifteen or sixteen years of age, I met him at a district conference. I recall that at that time the distinct impression of the Spirit came to me that he would some day be called to the work as a minister for Christ. When the Spirit directed my attention to him again this morning I recalled the impression of a few years ago concerning the boy.

“You may be able to conjecture by this time whom I have in mind; if not, I wish to say, with the firm conviction which can be conveyed to a man only by the direct manifestation of the Holy Spirit, that your son, Robert Clayton, is called to the office of elder, and if he shall be willing to accept the responsibilities of such office, a branch shall be organized in Banforth and he be placed in charge. This need not necessarily interfere with his secular work, as he can look after the branch work Sundays and do such work in the vicinity as he shall have time.

“I know not in what light you will consider this,

neither do I know as to how the young man will regard it, having had so little acquaintance with him; but I do know that the clear indications of the Spirit to me are that he is fitted for the place, and it is the Lord's desire he should so occupy.

"I write this morning that you and your son may have the matter under consideration until I reach you on Saturday, and hope that he may be able to determine his course by that time, and if favorable, we shall organize the branch next Sunday and get things in working order before you leave, as I feel you would appreciate being present at his ordination.

"Trusting that the Spirit may speak as clearly to your minds as it has done to mine, leaving no room for uncertainty, I am

"Your brother in the faith,  
"C. L. VENTON, *Missionary in Charge.*"

The sheets fluttered away from Robert's nerveless fingers. He lifted his head to meet his father's searching gaze and arose.

"It must be a mistake. I cannot accept it yet," he said tensely. "I am too young, and, in my judgment, unprepared. Besides, there are other things I wish to do first. I have always said to myself that I could never enter the missionary work until I had first earned enough for a home and sufficient to provide my family, if I should ever have one, with some of the comforts of life. I have felt that I never could depend upon the church for every cent that I needed. I am too independent for that."

"Your present local work will not interfere with

your earning and laying up in store. This will require only a portion of your time."

"Even so, but it may mean a greater requirement at any time, a fuller service. I grant you that I have felt for some time that I would be called, but I do think the time is not now."

"Is it that you *think* so, or that you do not *want* it so?" his father queried, his eyes calm, yet very considerate and kind. "Which is it, my son?"

The young man winced. "I think I realize my own lack of preparation as no one else can," he evaded. "The call has come too soon. I am not ready to receive it. Honestly, do you not think so?"

"That shall be left entirely for you to determine, my boy. You know as well as I how to obtain a *sure* knowledge for yourself. The main thing is that you will be willing to accept whatever that knowledge shall make plain. It is best that I say no more and leave it for you to decide, lest in the future you say of me, 'My father influenced me unduly to take this step before I was ready, and his will overruled mine.' No, make your own decision, as we all must, leaving my opinion entirely out of the question. I shall allow myself to make but this one more statement in the matter. I have learned that the Lord knows better who is old enough and who is sufficiently qualified to do his work than we do. That is all."

Robert answered not a word, but turning to the door went out of the house into the cool night air. As had been his habit from childhood, that when under any stress or perplexity of mind he had sought



comfort and relief from the great outdoor world where nature could administer to him her own soothing balm, so to-night he went out alone, and under the great, wide canopy of heaven, studded with its illimitable number of twinkling worlds, sought to fight out his battle, on the result of which depended all his future course in life, and may we not also conclude, the future course of many another whose life was yet to come in touch with his influence?

Shall I pause here and enter into the details of that conflict as it waged in the heart of the young man that night? Need I attempt to tell of all those assailing doubts and fears, the uppermost desires, the Tempter's wily suggestions, and the Spirit's gentle pleading? Oh, tried and valiant veterans of truth and of righteousness, who long ago in youth made your decision, and enlisting in the cause of Christ, buckled on "the whole armor of God," have you forgotten one least part of that struggle? Though years may have intervened since you moved bravely out, clasp ing in one hand the wonderful, invincible shield of faith, in the other the powerful sword of the Spirit, yet need I portray before you to-day this conflict of soul as fought out by Robert that night under the stars? Shall I presume to open the gateway of that scene to your mental vision? of this young man in the power and strength of his youth, in the spring-time of his ambitions and dreams, in the pride of his young manhood wrestling to lay all upon the altar of sacrifice? On the one hand he hears the call of the Master as it came long ago to the fishermen by the

sea: "Come, leave *all*, and follow me. Abide no longer in selfish contentment by the cool deep waters of fair Galilee; but come with me up rugged, thorny steeps, 'cross burning deserts, and through parched places of my vineyard, that they who suffer may receive of the water of life and thirst no more." On the other hand the Tempter whispers: "I ask you not to give up the bright dreams of success for me, the pleasures of life, nor the homage of men," and with his world-age tempting power insidiously adds, "All these will I give thee, if thou wilt but do my bidding."

Ah, no, faithful servants of the Master, you know it well—the struggles of that hour, that night—or was it days and weeks that passed before you dared to say, "I am ready to put on the whole armor and answer as a minuteman to his call, though it take me to the uttermost parts of his vineyard"?

No, I cannot open up one phase or point out one detail that would be new to your experience. And you have learned, too, since then, that the conflict is not ended in a day or a night, a month or year, but that even many times there may come a renewal of it until you have fully learned the lesson,

"There can be no furlough granted,  
Never must the flag be furled."

And, you, young man or young woman, who may not as yet have reached this supreme test, when there shall come to you, as there comes to every individual who makes covenant with God, the requirement of your full service, a kind of service that may per-

chance be not of your choosing and one which at the time may seem to deny you your fondest ambitions, remember the results of that decision will not affect your life only. It must needs be a hindrance or an inspiration to those whose lives your own shall touch. God's purposes and designs worked out in you mean the working out of his purposes and designs in others to the extent of your influence among them. Your failure to fulfill his purposes no measure of worldly success or honor can requite—no gain can equal its loss. For think as we will and plan as we may, no ambition can bring us greater success than that which comes of simple, humble service to God; no work can be so great for us to perform as the one designed of him we shall do, whether it shall be a work beheld and seen of many, or one obscure and humble, mayhap unnoticed save by the Christ himself.

Who climbs to the highest pinnacle of this world's renown, finds at last, as the Alpine traveler scaling the frozen and dizzy heights, naught but bareness and bleakness at the top; but he who climbs his Sinai with steady step and unswerving purpose, leaving behind him in the valley below the multitude with its foolish cant and acclaim, its frivolity and idolatry, will find awaiting him at the crest the radiant face of his Maker, and receive his full reward in the crowning glory of his presence.

So the night passed away, and when the soft glow spreading over the east bade the numberless host of twinkling lights vanish silently in the misty miracle

of approaching day, Robert arose from his grassy couch, and coming out from under the heavy shadows of the great basswood tree, crossed the yard and entered the house. Passing the sitting room door he caught sight of the dim outlines of a figure in his mother's favorite rocker, and went in.

"Mother of mine," he whispered as he came near, "mother of mine, have you, too, watched the night out with me?"

"I have watched the night out with you, my boy."

He knelt beside her chair and placed his head in her lap as he had been wont to do when a little child, and felt the soothing touch of her cool fingers through his heavy locks.

"You should not have done it. You have fought your battles. I am a man and must fight mine."

"Ay, and so must everyone fight his own, but a mother may not sleep while her boy fights."

There was a long silence; then stooping low, she pressed the dark head close to her and whispered, "And is the battle ended?"

"Not yet, mother mine," he answered, lifting his eyes to meet her earnest gaze, "not yet; but it is fairly begun."



## CHAPTER 16

### "THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING"

**T**HAT CLEAR, starlit night, so memorable in the history of two or three individuals, was followed by a moody and tempestuous day, beginning with a strong east wind and fast gathering clouds, which soon resulted in frequent and heavy bursts of wind and rain, settling finally about noon into a steady and quiet downpour.

After the chores and outside work were done, Robert spent the remainder of the morning in his own room, unpacking his trunk, which had not been brought from the station until late the evening before, and otherwise putting his room in order. Mamie sat on the floor beside the trunk, or helped him arrange his books in their places on the shelves, and listened with happy contentment as he told and retold incident after incident of college life which some pennant, scrap of paper, or chance souvenir brought to mind. There were no happier moments and hours to her than these—moments and hours when little confidences were exchanged between the brother and sister whose thoughts and ideals had always drifted in the same channels, and whose spirits were in sweet accord. They were the most treasured moments of her life, for there existed nothing of greater value in her eyes than his full, unbounded confidence. And as for that which he might choose to withhold

for a time, that of which he was not yet ready to give expression, as his experience of the night before, with intuitive understanding she carefully avoided in their conversation, willing to await the time she knew would surely come when he would relate it all of his own volition.

So the morning passed swiftly and happily enough to her, and after dinner Robert, exhausted and wearied from his long vigil of the night, threw himself upon his couch, and while the rain beat its ceaseless tattoo upon the roof, or dripped rhythmically from the eaves, he slumbered heavily and restfully through the long hours of the afternoon. Not till the gay little painted cuckoo bobbed out from its hiding place in the old-fashioned clock in the living room and announced in its croaky tones a late hour did he awaken to find the dusk of the evening gathering about him, and low against the horizon a narrow streak of mingled crimson and gold indicated the clouds and storm of the day were past and gave promise of a fairer to-morrow.

The following morning Robert arose early, and soon after breakfast walked down town on an errand to the grocery and for the morning mail. The nightmare of the preceding day seemed to have vanished with the passing of the clouds and storm. He felt renewed and invigorated after his long rest, and the fresh, rain-washed earth smiled back at him from moist grasses and dripping trees. The clear, clean atmosphere, the gay carols of the little feathered tree dwellers, the warmth and sunlight

sent his spirits up with that elastic rebound which is the heritage of the young.

With quick, energetic step he walked into the grocery to leave an order, and coming immediately out again, paused in front of the store to read an attractive poster in the window. As he stood there the wind whipped suddenly around the corner, carrying very distinctly a portion of the conversation of a couple of loiterers—conversation not intended for his ears:

"Fine fellow that Clayton. Brainiest young man in town."

"Guess you're right. Remarkably fine, but I've no use for his religion."

"No. Funny how one of his intellect will hang on to a church like that—poor and unpopular as it is."

"They say he's even likely to be a preacher—and——"

"You don't say! What a pity—such a waste of good material. It looks like——"

Becoming suddenly aware of his position as eaves-dropper, and failing to further concentrate his thoughts upon the poster, Robert hurried away and went across to the post office. He found it almost deserted, the mail having been distributed some time before. The sole occupant of the front part was a broad-shouldered, rather stout individual of middle age who stood writing at the money order window, hat set well back upon his head, his back toward the entrance. A traveling salesman from all appearances,

was Robert's thought as he walked past him to the other window and called for his mail. As he was about to pass back again the man turned around.

"As I live, Mr. Fendon!" Robert exclaimed with sudden recognition of one of the well-to-do merchants of his old home town, Fairfield, a member also of the branch of the church at that place. "What good luck has happened to bring you to Banforth?"

"The good luck of a change of scene and opportunity to get out and away from the store," responded the man, grasping the younger one's hand with a hearty shake. "Robert, I'm delighted to see you. Didn't you know I'd been on the road for nearly a year?"

"Indeed I did not," responded Robert, and then added as he gave him a comprehensive glance: "It seems to have agreed with you; you're much stouter than when I last saw you."

"You're right it has," declared the man, "and that's my reason for leaving and going on the road for a while. Too confining in the store and my health was going down all the time. Thought a change would do me good, so started out. Banforth happens to be in my territory, and we haven't met before because you have been away. I hear great reports of you, though, Robert, and by the way, I judge they must be true, since it happened to be my good fortune to call at Clifton City at an opportune time last winter. That was a great speech of yours in the debate. I never heard a better in my life."

"You there!" exclaimed Robert in surprise. "I



hadn't an idea in the world that any of my old friends from Fairfield were in that audience."

"So I was, though, and I'd have waited to speak to you, but it was only a few minutes after the close of the debate till my train was due, and I knew from the pandemonium that reigned among your friends it would be a good half hour before I could get to you. I had to run to catch it as it was," he laughed good-naturedly, "but it was worth a good run, even for a fat man, that last speech of yours."

"Thank you," Robert replied, and then turned the subject by inquiring about friends and acquaintances in his old home town. In a corner of the room they sat talking for some time of the changes that had occurred since the Clayton family had left Fairfield and moved to Banforth, then tipping comfortably back in his chair, Mr. Fendon suddenly and quite unexpectedly launched seriously into a new topic:

"Robert, I've just recently heard a rumor about you, and having been a member of this church a good many years, I am inclined to fear that it is true. Our church seems to have a habit of picking up our most promising looking young men and making preachers of them. I heard that there was a probability of your being ordained and set to work here."

Robert flushed, looked away for a moment, and then answered briefly: "The report is true; I have been asked to accept ordination."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed the other.

"Don't allow them to mollicoddle you like that. A fellow of your ability can't afford to spend his time preaching. A mere folly. Let somebody else do that and you go climbing on up where you belong. Why, boy, you can't afford to do it. Let the fellows do it that want to and are not fit for something else."

It was the Tempter back again, this time in the new guise of a friend and brother in the church, and the young man was silent.

"Don't throw yourself away like that," the man continued. "It's all very well for us to sacrifice and do our part in the church work, but it's a very foolish thing for you to give everything up right now, your plans and ambitions—oh, yes, I know you have them," he added, "and all your old friends have predicted a bright future for you."

Very seldom did flattery have any effect upon Robert's well-balanced mind, but it had been showered upon him from every side for weeks past, and now coming from this successful business man and old friend, a brother in the church, and one whose opinion he had always held in high esteem, the praise carried unusual weight, the advice strongly influenced, especially since it was so much in harmony with his own desires. The old conflict came back with renewed force and power. Again it was the Tempter saying, "All these will I give thee, if thou wilt bow down and worship me."

It must be stated in justice to Mr. Fendon that he was sincere in the belief that he was giving a

young man sound advice. The other side of the question had a very impractical aspect to him, a sure barrier to success as he viewed it, and he had a real desire to see the youth make choice that would bring him the best the world had to offer. The motives which prompted him, therefore, sprang from friendly interest, not necessarily from motives of evil, though misguided they may have been. And so he continued to talk and advise until a long, shrill whistle signaled the fact that the morning passenger train was approaching town.

"My train!" he exclaimed, rising hastily to his feet, "and I must be going at once. Yes, my trunks and valises are all at the depot," he added, in answer to Robert's inquiry. "The station agent said the train was at least an hour late, so I came back up town. Glad now I did and chanced to have this visit with you. Good-by, and remember what I've said. It's good advice, and don't let these over-zealous people carry you off and tie you to something you'll always regret and can't get away from." And with a hasty but hearty handshake he hurried away to the depot.

Left alone, Robert stood idly looking out from the post office window, pondering over again all the new arguments and suggestions which the conversation had brought up in his mind. If he were fitted for greater things, why accept this humble position? If he had the ability they credited him with, why keep it within the narrow confines of his own church? Why not broaden out and make his

gifts and accomplishments of service to the world at large? Could he not do greater work for mankind than in the narrower field? The world needed educators, high idealists, efficient lawyers, honest statesmen. Broad fields were open to the young man who chose to aspire. By entering them could he not serve both the church and the world? Was it not the greatest field after all? Many a good man or woman, he told himself, had accomplished more in philanthropic movements and great enterprises than could a mere minister who might convert a few souls to the gospel.

Standing thus idly by the window and deeply absorbed in his own thoughts, Robert took little note of outward scenes or passers-by until a certain familiar figure stepped out of a near-by store and crossed the street to one on the other corner. The light shone in clearly through the large window of the store, and from where Robert stood he could watch her make the few simple purchases which evidently completed her shopping list, for as she came out again she turned down the street which led toward the brown cottage. Twice he laid his hand on the knob of the screen door, twice he hesitated, then acting upon the impulse of the moment went out, and walking quickly overtook her before she had reached the end of the block.

"Too many packages for one to carry. Shall I relieve you?" he asked, as he reached her side.

She started perceptibly and one of the bundles dropped at her feet.



"Entirely too many, I agree with you," she replied with a confused little laugh, "though none of them are big enough to be burdensome. As many packages as purchases seems to be my luck, for when mother sends me down town to buy goods or trimming, to match thread or lace patterns, it is usually necessary to go to every store."

"You should have pockets, or else carry a shopping bag," he rejoined, stuffing the small articles here and there in his pockets.

"It's too warm for a jacket," she replied, "and I don't like shopping bags."

"There, isn't that better?" he asked, as having disposed of the last one he took the sunshade from her hand. "Is your mother in need of these things at once that we must walk home by way of this hot, sunny street? Or may we take the longer, shadier one?"

Without waiting for her assent Robert directed her toward the latter and they walked along for a few moments in silence in the coolness of the shadowy elms whose great arms stretched gracefully above them. In and out amid their dark green foliage flitted the little, bright-eyed, feathered, people, too intent upon their work of home-making and home-keeping to give but a curious glance at their passing.

"This town is certainly in her glory to-day," he remarked at last. "Other places may be more pretentious, but with her grand old native trees and

her orchards Banforth can't be beaten in June time for real beauty."

"Really, I'm surprised to hear you acknowledge it. I thought you had become so enamored of Clifton City you'd never be able to break away from it, and would find little of interest in our quiet place again," replied Janey.

"Clifton City is all right, and it was hard to leave," he assented, "but I'm glad enough to be at home and among my friends here once more."

"You didn't seem especially anxious to come back or to see them," the girl rejoined, lightly.

"Perhaps *some* do not seem to care particularly," he retorted quickly, "being more interested in others." On the instant he would have been glad to recall the words if he could have done so; they sounded mean and cowardly.

"I—I don't understand," she began; then with a sudden comprehension and a little flash of anger, added, "I know of no reason why they shouldn't be. Anyhow it's of no consequence to anyone else. Our friendships need not be narrowed to a few."

"I beg your pardon," he apologized with contrition. "I had no right to speak in that way."

There was an awkward pause as they walked in silence a short distance. Nevertheless, the constraint did not continue long, for somehow, in spite of misunderstanding, doubts, and misgivings, it was broken, the old comradely feeling returned, and they were soon discussing school problems and college life as freely as they had ever done.

Even the very longest street in town may not prove long enough under some circumstances. If not, a little by-lane may lend cheerful aid in lengthening out the distance, especially if it runs off through a quiet portion, perchance toward daisy-bedecked meadows, and possibly with a convenient, old-fashioned stile at its termination. It was fortunate enough that Mrs. Warren was not in a hurry for the thread and sundry parcels of silk and braid that morning, else some dress might have been delayed and an irate customer accuse her of not keeping a promise. Having utterly forgotten such inconsequential matters, and heedless of the passing of time, the two sat on the old stile and talked. Apologizing for his failure to call at the brown cottage the day before, Robert had gradually though hesitatingly led the conversation up to the subject which had weighed so heavily upon his mind since reading the letter his father had handed him two evenings before, and of the problem which still awaited his decision and concerning which the talk in the post office that morning had again thrown him into a state of perplexity. Little by little he told her something of his struggle and conflict, his uncertainty and his indecision, while she sat above him on the top step with now and then only a brief question or a murmured assent in response. Even as he related it the whole matter seemed less momentous—the sacrifice and burden, how it had been magnified in his own eyes! He felt her sympathetic attitude and yet—had he placed too much stress

on the thought of his own ability and sacrifice? Not till he was telling her of the conversation of the morning with Mr. Fendon, did he begin to realize this more keenly; then he became aware that he did not wish to place before her clear judgment some of the arguments which the man had used and which he must admit to himself had affected him seriously. He therefore passed somewhat lightly over these; nevertheless the girl was in no wise deceived. She discerned matters even better than if he had told her all, and her frank, plain questions now brought dismay.

"And you say," she questioned, her earnest brown eyes looking straight down at his as he sat on the second step, "that this man you met in the post office this morning was a Latter Day Saint? Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Robert quickly, failing to catch the import of her meaning. "He's been in the church a good many years. I've known him a long time."

"Well!" mused Janey, as though deeply mystified, "yet you say this man, a brother in the church and friend, told you you were wasting your life—in other words that it was a very foolish thing for you to give up things of vastly greater importance in which you might do so much?"

"He did," admitted Robert, a little reluctantly.

"And he told you, I infer, though you haven't exactly stated it that way, that a person of your capabilities and *brains* [there was a touch of sarcasm



slipped in on the latter word] might spend them in a better way than preaching."

"Ye-s, that's about what he said," Robert confessed with some confusion. This straightforward question coming from the girl, with its veiled touch of sarcasm, threw an entirely different light upon it than the flattering tones of others had made it appear.

"And he carried the idea," she queried persistently, while for the first time he looked away from her searching gaze, "that it was all a mistake; that his wisdom, and yours, was greater than others in making this choice, thereby casting a reflection on the call?"

Robert did not answer. This fusilade of questions was so entirely different from what he had expected that he was confused and humiliated; ashamed of the egotism that had suffered him to harbor such thoughts or arguments, even for an instant. Their admonition brought to his mind a warning statement that had been given him in his blessing: "Be careful, and be admonished that when flattering tongues shall praise thee, to guard against thinking too highly of thyself."

"I gather from what you have told me," Janey went on without regard for his discomfiture, and looking not at him now but at the little group of field daisies in the corner of the fence, "that it would be the height of folly for one of your ability who could win honors from the world, to spend your time and talents in this way and for so little material recom-

pense; that the calling of a minister was an inferior one, and fit only for others less endowed with natural gifts. I have nothing to say as to your final decision, Robert," looking down at him again and then back to the nodding, smiling daisies in the fence corner, "that is entirely your own affair; but for myself, I am glad that God chose, through the foolishness of preaching, to save humanity. I am glad," she continued, "that the great Apostle Paul was willing to lay aside worldly ambitions, to give up pride of caste and creed, and listening to the call of God, become nothing more than a humble servant of his cause and a preacher of righteousness. He gave up wealth and fame, as he no doubt thought, but to-day the rulers of kingdoms are forgotten, while his name lives and will still live through all time.

"I am glad too," she continued after a short pause, "that even the Christ, with his divine *intellect*"—Robert winced—"chose to use it in the service of preaching, that his matchless mind conceived no greater ambition than to utter the words and do the will of his Father."

Robert's face was very white now. She caught its look of tense pain and her tones softened a little, though she went relentlessly on:

"Personally I have great reason to rejoice in the fact, that in this age there have been men willing to relinquish the world and make the effort to establish Christ's church once more, to receive his word, to heed his will, and to lead mankind back into the old paths. It is the greatest thing in the world, Robert,

and to me it seems there could be no greater calling, no higher honor than the call of God to perform a specific part in it. I should like to ask that man whom you talked with this morning—you call him a Latter Day Saint—I shall not say what I call him, anyhow I consider him unworthy of that name—I say I should like to ask him how it was he was brought to a knowledge of the truth if not through the sacrifice of others and the preaching of the word. I should like to ask him while he sits idly by and offers advice——”

“Enough, Janey, please do not say any more,” her listener entreated.

She stopped him with a motion of her hand and rising stepped down on a lower step of the stile. Robert arose, too. “Just one thing more,” she insisted. “I shall never cease to be grateful that your father made the sacrifice he has done; that he considered the cause worthy of his time and his best powers in order that a few of us wandering, rebellious ones might be led into the kingdom.”

“Worthy his time and his best powers!” Robert looked up at her as she still stood one step above him, her face glowing with the fire of deep feeling with which her soul had been stirred, and marveled that he had ever considered the calling of God as so light a thing. Were such souls as hers worthy the effort? Could any reward or honor be compared to the bringing of such into his kingdom?

Something of these thoughts, as well as admiration of her courage, and of his regard for her shone

in his eyes as she brought her gaze back from the distant meadows to his face, and precipitately she changed the subject:

"How far the morning has passed! It must be nearing the noon hour and mother will be needing her thread. I have been giving a dreadful tirade, haven't I? It's easy enough to talk, you know," she said, smilingly, "and very easy to understand what another should do. Take my suggestions for what they are worth and—let us be going."

Her sudden change of manner brought Robert to himself. "I have no right to encroach past mere friendship's lines," he thought. "She has given me to understand that already. Her friendship is too precious to risk a breaking, and it is plain I need it. There are enough barriers in the way as it is, and I must consider her happiness, not selfishly my own."

With this conclusion he silently helped her down from the stile and they turned their steps homeward.

Robert stayed for dinner at the brown cottage and disposed of the delayed but bountiful dish of strawberries and cream Lu had promised him. Shortly after dinner he telephoned to Mamie to get her tennis racket and come over, and Billy, dropping in a little while later, the six young people spent the afternoon at the tennis courts in the park.



## CHAPTER 17

"LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAY"

ELDER VENTON, the missionary in charge, arrived at the appointed time, Saturday. Two or three had given their names for baptism, and the ordinance was to be attended to at an early hour the next day in the creek near Farmer Grayson's. Accordingly, early Sunday morning the good farmer sent his big team and carryall in to take a number out who wished to go, while Billy made two trips with his car for the Warrens and Claytons, taking part of them back to town as soon as the services were over, and the remainder to his uncle's for dinner, promising to drive in with them in time for the afternoon meeting which was to be held at Mr. Clayton's. This *remainder* consisted of Janey, Mamie, Madeline, and Ned.

There were few present at that afternoon meeting besides the Saints. A sweet, beautiful peace was there from the very beginning, and Robert, who had passed through his long struggle and conquered at last, when the hands of the elders were laid upon his head in ordination, felt the overwhelming power of the Spirit envelop him, and with it came the confirming assurance that God had recognized his sacrifice and would fully compensate for all his trials. In those moments he realized as never before the peace which passeth understanding and the joy that the

Holy Spirit alone can bring. Before the ordination was finished no doubts whatever were left in his mind with regard to his calling and responsibility. The revelation of the Spirit came in enlightening power and strong assurance, and he *knew* that he was "called of God as was Aaron," and that henceforth his service was to be that of a minister of Christ's own appointing. To such he testified to the little band of assembled Saints before the meeting closed, and in the strength of his humility manifested his worthiness of being their spiritual leader.

The bright June Sabbath afternoon drew towards its close with the hearts of the faithful little band greatly comforted, their courage renewed, and their faith strengthened.

Shortly before sunset Billy received a telephone call from his uncle to return immediately. The daughter living in the adjoining county was ill and the car was needed at once to take them to her home. So it chanced that in the quiet of a beautiful evening Robert walked home with Janey by longest road and through quiet by-lane, past the meadow where the daisies were already closing their pretty eyes in sleep as the sun touched them gently with his last long rays. Reaching at last the little gate in front of the brown cottage, they loitered again till night lighted all her wonderful, mysterious, tiny lamps in the dome of Nature's great cathedral.

The following afternoon Mr. Clayton left for his mission field in the Northwest. Robert and Mamie walked with him to the depot, and the older man's

eyes filled as he took within his own the strong, young hand of his son.

"It is well, my son; you have chosen well, and God will help you bear all the burdens that may be laid upon you," he murmured. "He has never failed me in all these years, and he will not forsake you in the time of need. Do not forget."

"I shall try to always remember," Robert replied, with an answering pressure, and turned to comfort his sister as the train carried their father out of sight.

It was a day of changes and readjustments for many of our friends. Billy began his new work in the bank that morning, and soon after his father left, Robert and Ned walked out to Farmer Grayson's to work the remainder of the week in the harvest field, the only available work to be found, and Robert felt he could not afford to rest another day. Janey and Lu began sewing, for the following week the older sister must leave home to attend summer school. Elder Venton was to stay the rest of the week, remaining over another Sunday, so Robert felt that for the time at least he would be comparatively free from that burden.

Plans, however, are subject to circumstances. Saturday noon Elder Venton received a telegram summoning him to another part of the field to preach a funeral sermon. Announcement for a service to be held Sunday evening had already been widely circulated, and if he left there would be no one but Robert to take his place. The service was to be in the park,

and when Robert reached home, walking in from Farmer Grayson's after a hard week's work in the field, that Saturday evening, it was with consternation he heard the news of the elder's departure and the message from him to fill the appointment.

"I regret very much to leave you in this extremity," the note ran, "but the call is imperative. I am aware it is a hard position to place you in for your first sermon, but I feel you will have strength given for the task. I would advise that you make the effort to occupy, rather than call the meeting off. You will feel better over the result. But should you feel that you cannot, the work is in your hands and you must do as you believe to be best."

Robert read this with a sinking heart. "I had always hoped," he confided to Mamie, "that when I made a start I could do so out among people where I am not so well acquainted. I feel it wouldn't be so hard, but things are always being turned around for me and the dreaded happens."

With the heaviness of responsibility weighing upon him he went to bed that night, to lie awake many hours, to sleep at times but fitfully, and to dream only of defeat and failure, of unsuccessful attempts to present his arguments clearly and logically, and of the scornful ridicule pictured in the eyes of his hearers. Considerable prejudice had been aroused by the late meetings and baptisms, and the news of his ordination had flown at once all over town among his young associates. If they heard of the departure of Elder Venton they would all be cer-



tain to be present, curious to hear his first awkward attempts to present his faith and belief. What if he failed under such circumstances? What would they say? Would they not laugh and say it was but folly and boasted talk of inspiration?

More than once he decided, as he tossed restlessly upon his pillow, to call it off as soon as morning came, and as many times decided that was a coward's course. But when morning did come and they assembled for Sunday school, he discovered it was a loyal little band ready to stand by him in his emergency.

"Fail? Why you can't fail," Ned declared, positively. "Nobody ever saw you make a failure yet of anything you tried to do, and our faith and prayers ought to help some."

"Sure it will be all right and we'll do our best for you," accorded Billy, heartily. "We'll get together this afternoon and practice some songs and try to work up something special. Don't back down, Robert; we know you can do it," he urged. "Come, girls, there's time for a little practice right now. Mamie, the piano's waiting. Let's find something to sing."

"And you?" Robert whispered to Janey, who was standing silently at one side of the group.

"The promise of the Lord is sure to those who trust in him," she answered in a voice so low as not to be heard by the others.

He felt strongly reinforced for his task; but that afternoon following the short prayer service when

he had gone away to the woods to outline his subject for the evening's discourse, doubts and fears again assailed him. The situation was one from which even an experienced man might shrink, and for this inexperienced youth of twenty it was a crisis indeed. There would be no one of the priesthood present to assist him, even in the opening exercises. His young friends would be there to sing, but for the rest he must enter the pulpit alone.

The hour for the evening service was drawing rapidly near, and alone in the quiet of the woods Robert knelt to gain strength in prayer and courage to face his task. The promised Comforter did not fail him, and as he arose from his knees with renewed confidence and trust there were borne impressively in upon his mind the words of an old hymn he had often heard his mother sing:

"The time is far spent—there is little remaining  
To publish glad tidings by sea and by land,  
Then hasten, ye heralds! go forward proclaiming  
‘Repent, for the judgments of God are at hand!’  
Shrink not from your duty, however unpleasant,  
But follow the Savior, your pattern and friend;  
Your little afflictions, though painful at present,  
Ere long with the righteous in glory will end.

"Be fixed in your purpose, for Satan will try you,  
The weight of your calling he perfectly knows;  
Your path may be thorny, but Jesus is nigh you,  
His arm is sufficient, though demons oppose.  
Press on to the mark of eternal perfection,  
Determined to reap the celestial reward,  
That you may come forth in the first resurrection,  
And feast at the supper of Jesus the Lord."

With the admonition of this hymn ringing in his inner consciousness, and the assurance that all would be well, Robert resolutely turned his footsteps in the direction of town and went straight to the park where, as he had anticipated, a large crowd had already assembled, including practically every young person of his acquaintance in Banforth—not seekers after truth especially, but drawn together through the medium of curiosity.

Nevertheless, the little group of earnest supporters on the platform by the organ did their part to encourage him, and while they sang he felt the Spirit again encircle him, its enlightenment fill his mind and clear his thoughts, and as he began to speak all fear of any nature whatsoever left him. With a freedom of language and liberty of thought that delighted his friends and surprised himself as well as his hearers, he poured forth an earnest discourse, powerful in delivery and convincing in logic, and was amazed to find when he had finished that he had talked uninterruptedly for forty-five minutes.

An astonished crowd dispersed almost silently after the dismissal. Only a remark dropped here and there gave indication of the effect the discourse had made upon it.

"Must have put in a powerful lot o' time gettin' a sermon like that ready," was the comment one man was overheard to make. "Didn't have note of any kind, either. He sure had the Scriptures down

"I always said he was a mighty smart boy," repeated.

marked another. "Never been away to theological school like most of these preachers either. But his father's a minister and a splendid good talker himself, and I reckon the boy's got some of his ability."

But Robert and other members of his devoted band in humble gratitude thanked God that night that the promise made almost twenty centuries ago had never passed away, but was still true as the day it was spoken, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."



## CHAPTER 18

## THE CAMP AT TIMBER LAKE

**B**ANFORTH was visited by an unusually long stretch of hot weather that summer. Long, burning, sunshiny days passed by in steady succession, giving place only to heavy, oppressive nights which brought little relief. The soft, green meadows of June turned brown under the sweltering heat of July, and to a dusky gray with the drought of August. Fortunately for the country and crops an abundance of spring and early summer rains had filled the soil with a plentiful supply of water, so that much of the small grain had been harvested and the corn was well matured before the drought could seriously affect it.

Through all these long summer days our young people found plenty of work to occupy brain and hand. Lu's time was filled to the brim with the customary household tasks, keeping the garden free from weeds, gathering and canning fruit, and occasionally giving the mother a lift with her dressmaking. Madeline was given charge of the chickens and helped Lu and her mother about the place wherever she was most needed. Janey, away at summer school a greater part of the time, was carrying a course as heavy as the normal school would permit. Robert spent his Sundays looking after the needs of the branch and Sunday school, and spare moments

reading books in connection with his church work, or studying school textbooks preparatory to the teachers' examination he would be required to take in August. During the week he and Ned worked in the harvest fields, and as the season progressed, went across the line into another State. The prosperous condition of the country around brought an increase of work to bankers and merchants, and many a day Billy bent to his task over journal and ledger long past the hour of closing time.

Therefore, on account of the heat and work, it was rather a fagged out, tired looking little group of young people that found themselves once more together the latter part of August, the strenuous tasks of the summer behind them, new duties lying ahead, and all feeling the need of a little recreation before taking them up. A day or two of refreshing rain coming at this time, breaking the drought and bringing with it a wave of cool, reviving air, the young folks decided that the time was ideal for a camping trip, and forthwith began planning for one. A week, with the exception of Sunday, was set aside for it, Timber Lake was selected as the place, and about a dozen were chosen to make up the camping party, consisting of the Warrens, the Claytons, Billy, Sarah McEllman, Sam Gates, Larry and Dora Drake, and Macy and Meta Benders, while Mrs. Clayton, Mrs. Warren, and Sarah's mother were to accompany them as chaperons.

Monday morning the boys drove out in Billy's car to the lake, selected an ideal spot, cool and shady, for

the girls' and the chaperons' tents, another equally as pleasant a few rods distant and a little farther up the hill for their own, cleared away the low underbrush and stubs, and pitched the tents, erecting also a small one for provisions, dishes, utensils, and general cooking purposes. These preliminaries completed, they drove back to town, returning in the afternoon with a wagon load of camp chairs, tables, bedding, and provisions, the girls riding atop of the load, a merry lot, the chaperons being taken in the car. The following morning tennis courts were measured off, a croquet ground prepared, boats were rented, fishing tackle, hunting jackets, and bathing suits hauled out of suit cases and boxes, and the campers entered into five days of such recreation and sport as some of them had never found time to indulge in before. It was all the more enjoyable because of being so well earned and deserved. Five beautiful, care-free memorable days, when the voices of the young campers rang out across the surface of pretty Timber Lake, the splash of the oar and of the bathers rippled her waters, while at least three times a day they gathered around the camp table near the cook tent, appetites sharpened to a keen edge by the outdoor life and exercise, and disposed of the appetizing dishes concocted by various ones of their party.

It was agreed on the very first evening, when assembled around a blazing camp fire, made particularly inviting by the chill night breeze, that the burden of the camp must not be allowed to fall upon the chaperons; that the young people must carry

the greater portion of responsibility as well as the work of the camp, for the mothers needed a rest from household cares as well as the younger ones needed recreation. To apportion the work impartially among them, then, was the first problem. The boys, of course, were soon allotted the tasks of providing water for the camp, wood and kindling for fires, making such trips to town as would be necessary for obtaining added provisions and ice, and supplying fish as they might be fortunate enough to catch in the lake and near-by streams.

Apportioning the work among the girls was not dispensed with so easily.

"I move we draw lots for the one to be chief cook," suggested one of the girls.

"Oh, dear, no!" protested Sarah in dismay. "You'll all regret it if it happens to fall to me. I can't even scramble eggs, mother says, without making a dismal failure of it."

"Poor prospects for you, Sam," sang out Larry. "Better invite her to take a few lessons in domestic science, but please wait till this picnic's over. We don't want her to practice on us."

"What does Sam care? He's been in the seventh heaven for several weeks past," said Macy.

"Nevertheless, I can attest the fact that he's supremely mortal when it comes to doing justice to a good dinner," declared Billy.

"I say, let's appoint Lu as chief cook; she's the best in the whole gang, chaperons not excepted," cheerfully proposed Larry, rolling over on the grass



into a more comfortable position. "There won't be any crumbs left for the squirrels even, if she prepares the meals."

"Let's do," agreed Meta. "Will you, Lu? I'll agree to help you do anything, if you'll just go ahead with the cooking. I detest to cook."

"And the rest of us will clean up the tents and wash all the dishes," added Sarah.

"Ah, come off!" interposed Billy before Lu had a chance to answer. "I'll allow no one to take exception to Lu's cooking, but she's drudged at housework all summer, and I say it's only fair that she have a respite as well as the rest of us."

"That's right," assented the others, quickly. "We must arrange to share the work and responsibility more equally than that."

"If you object so strongly then, Mr. Billy, suppose we put you boys in charge of the cooking one day," mischievously suggested Sarah.

"We can do it all right," declared Ned; "that is," he added, "provided you girls will take our places and furnish the wherewithal, carry the water, catch the fish, and so on, and agree to eat what we cook. We'll give you typical boys' camp grub—breakfast, dinner, and supper."

"Hurrah! that'll be a regular lark," cried Lu. "I'll loan you my big apron and cap for the occasion."

"And mine," and "I mine," one after another of the girls repeated. "And remember you've got to promise to wear them."

"Sure, we will," one of the boys answered. "We'll not be bluffed out by aprons and caps."

A general hubbub followed, which did not subside for several minutes, during which various stipulations were proposed, discussed, and finally rejected or agreed upon by both parties.

"Then one day is decided upon by way of variation," said Janey, as the crowd grew quieter again. "Suppose we set the boys' day for Thursday; that's the middle one of the vacation. There will be four days left. Each two of us girls might take a day."

"There are only seven of us, and that will leave one girl a day alone or else a day not provided for," said Madeline.

"The chaperons will take care of that day and leave you one entirely free," spoke up Mrs. McEllman, while the other two ladies nodded approval.

Protests and objections to this plan were finally overruled by the three ladies in question, and the rest was soon disposed of, with Janey and Mamie to take charge the following day, Meta, Madeline, and Dora assigned for Wednesday, the boys Thursday, the chaperons Friday, and Lu and Sarah for Saturday, the closing one of the camp.

As might be readily suspected, everyone looked forward to Thursday for an unusual bit of fun and good time when the routine of camp life would be turned about and the duties of boys and girls exchanged. And it was with an assumption of pretended dignity, much mimicking, primping, and powdering be-

fore mirrors that the boys that morning donned the dainty lace or boudoir caps the girls brought them, as well as the big aprons, and came gayly out to the cook tent to the task of frying bacon and preparing breakfast. Meanwhile the girls in their gym suits piled up the wood for the camp fire, made more or less awkward attempts at splitting the kindling, and valiantly carried the water up the hill, pausing between trips to laugh at the boys' comical speeches and antics in their ridiculous attire.

That was by no means a quiet breakfast. The squirrels of Timber Lake did not approach very near for their daily portion of crumbs that morning, but went scampering away to the tops of the very tallest trees, there to peer down at them through the thick foliage with wondering eyes. What queer, noisy creatures human beings are, they must have thought.

Breakfast with all its jolly accompaniment of laughter and bright witticisms concluded, the girls sallied forth valiantly with fishing tackle to catch fish for dinner, even heroically baiting their own hooks with the wriggling worms (which some of them would not have attempted under other circumstances). It may be whispered on the side, that more credit was due to Lu than to any other one of the girls that the supply of fish was abundant that noon. Determined that the girls should not be outdone in the matter of providing, she stuck faithfully to her task long after some of the others had become discouraged, and never relinquished it till the shiners in the pail were equal in number and

weight to any the boys had furnished; then together they cleaned and triumphantly carried them up to the cook tent.



## CHAPTER 19

## EYES, EARS, KNOT HOLES, AND CREVICES

CORN FRITTERS at a camp breakfast! high living! Looks like Lu had hold of the domestic wheel all right," exclaimed Billy as the campers gathered around the breakfast table Saturday morning. "Look at 'em," leaning over and inspecting them admiringly; "puffy and light as down. Makes me hungrier than a bear at the very sight of 'em. Feel as if I could eat the whole platter full."

"Don't flatter yourself that you'll have the chance," said Sam, eyeing the big platter heaped up with the fluffy, brown concoctions with a jealous eye. "If there's one thing above another I do like it's corn fritters, and plenty of 'em, says I. Besides it's incumbent on all of us to look after your health in this matter. It wouldn't do for you to get indigestion the last day of camp life and take it back with you to the bank. 'Twouldn't be a good investment." And Sam reached out a long arm and, successfully spearing a particular brown beauty with his fork, transferred it to his plate.

"The last day!" groaned Larry. "Don't torture me by saying it's the sixth day of the camp, and that we have to go back to town this evening. I can't believe it. I could vow we haven't been here more than two days."

"And school begins Monday," lamented Meta, "and the week will be hot and endless. Why is it, can anybody tell me, that a week of school is three times as long as a picnic week?"

"Conundrum," said Sam solemnly, helping himself to a second fritter before passing the plate to Sarah. "Meta has propounded a conundrum which the wisdom of the wise may answer. Too busy to give it thought myself at present, being temporarily engaged with arts more pleasing."

"Don't be frivolous, Sam; we thought it permanent," piped up Macy.

"Fritters seem to be anything but permanent here," Sarah diverted.

"I wish things could be turned around the other way," said Larry, "the school time short and a picnic last forever. Think of it! there'll be at least two sweltering weeks in September before it turns cool. Just imagine delving into an old geometry with the mercury standing at ninety in the shade, perspiring over Cicero's dry-as-dust speeches, or wearing one's brains out trying to fathom the depths of thought of some vagrant author who never——"

"No, no, quite impossible," declared Lu, coming up at that moment with another tray of fritters. "Anyone acquainted with you, Larry, knows well there is no danger of the latter catastrophe. I can almost hear now Professor Berson saying with the gravest solemnity, 'Larry Drake should apply himself more diligently to his studies. Cicero's most

excellent orations should not be lightly treated. They are worthy a student's highest endeavors.' "

A general laugh went round the camp table over Lu's clever imitation of the staid old professor, as well as her timely thrust at Larry, whose spasmodic efforts at studying had become a well-established joke among his schoolmates. Larry only grunted good-naturedly when to make amends for her speech she gave him the biggest fritter on the tray.

"Well, we've still one day left and we'd better make the best of what we have and not bemoan what's coming," advised Ned. "What's the program?"

"Everything," replied Billy promptly. "I move that we crowd into this day everything we've done this week——"

"Which means fishing, bathing, boating, games, tree climbing, hunting——" interrupted Sam.

"And that we don't break camp till old Sol has given us a last, long farewell, and we are left to make our way home by the light of the silvery moon," Billy finished.

"You should recollect that this is Saturday, and that some of us have work to do getting things straightened up and ready for school Monday morning," interposed Lu.

"What's the odds? It's the last playday of the season. No telling when we'll ever get another, and we'll have to work like beavers from now on. Let's improve each shining minute," argued Billy.

"Wish we could find something entirely different

to do. We ought to make the last day especially memorable," Sarah remarked a trifle pensively.

"Might get your fortunes told," suggested Robert, speaking for the first time since they had sat down to the table. "A bunch of gypsies camped down by the lake last night. I discovered their camp this morning when I was out taking an early morning row on the lake."

"Gypsies!" screamed several of the girls in chorus. "Real gypsies, Robert?"

"Gypsies! *real, live* gypsies!" mimicked Billy in a high falsetto. "I'm a witness to the truth of Robert's statement. I saw them with my own eyes."

"Oh, girls, how lovely! Let's get our fortunes told."

"Oh, *do* let's get our fortunes told," mimicked Billy again. "So lovely!"

"Robert, do tell us where they are, please," said Sarah, coaxingly, ignoring Billy's interruptions.

"Oh, yes, Robert; tell us, quick," urged Meta and Madeline.

"Somewhere along the bank of the lake," replied Robert with exasperating calmness as he poured the maple syrup plentifully over his cake.

"We'll agree to give you their exact location if you'll let us hear the fortunes," proposed Billy. "Otherwise——"

"Indeed, we'll not do anything of the kind," replied Sarah.

"Gypsies won't let you listen," cried Dora. "I've had mine told a lot of times and they never will tell



anything when others are around. So, Mr. Billy, if you won't tell us I just guess we can find them ourselves."

"What did they tell you?" inquired Larry.

"I'm not going to tell that either. It was good, though. I'm going to be rich and cross the ocean."

"The most likely thing in the world. Guess I'll get mine told. Girls always are silly enough to believe that every word a gypsy says is true."

"Well," declared Sarah, quite impressively, "a gypsy told me some things that did happen all right, and she told mother a lot of things that happened in her life, didn't she, mother?"

"I don't believe they can tell anything about the future, though," said Lu. "How could they?"

"I don't know how they tell, but they surely hit some things straight enough. It came out just like they said. Anyhow it's bushels of fun."

"I should say it is," affirmed Dora. "Please tell us—you will, won't you, Robert?"

"Indeed we'll not let him tell it unless you'll give us a chance to hear, or solemnly promise you'll tell us everything she says," interposed Billy.

"Then we'll just hunt 'em up ourselves. You don't have to tell us."

There was a hurried breaking up of the breakfast group on the part of the girls, and the boys having finished a little later, went up the hill to their tent for bathing suits, then down toward the old boat-house by the lake for a plunge.

"We've simply got to find those gypsies, girls,"

said Sarah. "Let's leave the dishes for a little while. Come on, Janey, we'll hunt them. Why didn't you coax Robert to tell? He'd have told *you*."

"I'm not so sure about that," Janey replied. "Nor so sure either but what the boys are just trying to get us excited. Nevertheless, if there *are* some gypsies about, I'm in for having some fun."

"So am I. I'm just crazy to have my fortune told," declared Meta.

"Bah! such silly nonsense!" ejaculated Lu, with scorn. "I wouldn't spend a nickel or a minute's time on the old frauds. They tell you nothing but a lot of stuff."

"Yes, they can, too. I know they can. You just try them once and see," declared Dora a trifle indignantly. "Come, Lu, and if we find them we'll prove it to you."

"Run along, you crazy girls, if you must," Lu commanded, with an independent little toss of the head, "but I shall stay right here. Clear off, the whole outfit of you. Yes, Sarah, you may go, and I'll wash up these dishes and attend to the preliminaries of dinner that I may have food prepared for your hungry bodies. You'll need something to sustain them after you've spent hours trotting around the lake fortune hunting. The gypsy'll have the fortune I'll be bound. I'll advise you to leave your pocketbooks with me and take only a small amount of change. They'll be safer here, no doubt."

"Oh, leave the dishes and come on. You don't want to miss the fun."

"Please do," coaxed another.

But all arguments, inducements, and persuasions failing to move the obdurate Lu, the girls left off teasing her finally, and stopping only long enough to slip into the last clean shirt waists, give sundry final pats to their hair, and don hats, the six were off, a lively, chattering bunch as they hastened down the hill.

"I just wonder what they'll tell us," giggled Meta. "Do you know, girls, I feel so funny—to think of having my fortune told."

"Better put that diamond out of sight, Sarah. She'll be sure to spy it the first thing and have a clew," said Dora. "If she's any good she'll tell of your engagement anyhow. I'd laugh if she described Sam."

Sarah flushed, but obediently took the ring from her finger, and slipping it over her locket chain, dropped it under the lace at her throat.

"Which way shall we go, girls?" asked Janey. "Do you suppose we better get a boat?"

"No, let's walk. Honest, I don't think the camp's very far," said Sarah.

"I think it's this way," said Madeline. "I saw a smoke awhile ago over in this direction. I most know it was their camp fire. If it is, we can walk. It's not far from the boathouse, I think."

"Then let's go that way and see. If there are no signs of them there, we'll get a boat and row across the lake."

Straight for the old boathouse they started, and

long before they came in sight around the bend their laughter and chatter heralded their approach. Near the boat landing the boys were arrested from the exhilaration of their morning plunge as the voices of the girls were borne to their ears.

"By ginger! boys," exclaimed Billy, raising his head above the water and looking in the direction of the camp, "it's the girls out on a hunt for the gypsies, sure as fate, and, hail Columbia!" he added gleefully, "if there doesn't come the old hag of a fortune teller now from the gypsy camp. She's on the scent all right. Did you ever see anything so lucky in your life? The chances are they'll meet somewhere near the boathouse. Let's hie for the back entrance. We can get there and into it without observation from the road. Duck quick, every one of you."

Without waiting for a second's deliberation and keenly alive to the humor of the situation, the boys obeyed Billy's command and "ducked," coming to surface again underneath the boat landing and scrambling up through an inner opening into the boathouse, like so many wet rats.

The boathouse was an old, weather-beaten, dilapidated structure, having served well its time, but containing now wide cracks, big knot holes—and in some places whole boards were missing. The boys sought the most convenient and available of these for observation of the road and awaited further developments.

They had not long to wait. Scarcely had they disposed themselves to their satisfaction when the girls



came into view again around another little bend in the road, while from the other direction the gypsy was hastening to meet them. A disreputable looking creature she was, garments woefully soiled, a bright red scarf about her shoulders, immense earrings suspended from the lobes of her ears, hair frowsy and uncombed, black eyes shrewd and cunning. She darted forward as she spied the girls and stopped directly in front of them less than a dozen feet from the shore side of the old boathouse where the boys were secreted.

"Your fortune, little ladies? Let ze gypsy tell fortune. I tell good fortune. Gypsy fortune teller always tell true—tell you much little ladies like to know—much little ladies ought to know. Fortune?"

"Oh, girls, I'm scared," whispered Meta Benders, giggling and sidling backwards.

"Oh, no, no—gypsy fortune teller won't hurt little lady—zey do you good," said the artful beggar whose sharp ears had detected the whisper. "Gypsy lady know something good to tell *you*. You want to hear it? Cross my palm with silver, ma'am—that's it. Now, rest of you go 'way—just little way. I tells yours d'rectly."

Reluctantly the other five moved back and stood upon a little knoll at one side, while with eyes pressed close to knot hole and crevice six boys listened breathlessly to the extravagant utterances of the old woman over Meta's outstretched palm.

"You happy little girl—very happy little girl—lots o' friends—good home—some these days you find

lover—you find him soon. He big, tall—dark eyes, very dark—he come from 'way off. He meet you one day, he like you, he go way—zen he write you letter—you write him—by'n by he come back—he take you way, way wi' him."

Meta's eyes were growing bigger and rounder every moment as the gypsy proceeded, and the listening boys were nearly convulsed at her credulous expression.

"Meta's swallowing that all whole, just like a young robin does grubs," declared her twin brother in a disgusted stage whisper. "She's the easiest duped thing I ever saw."

"Not so loud," cautioned Robert, while the rough board Larry was leaning on popped ominously at that moment. The noise caused the gypsy to look around cautiously, but seeing no stir about the boat-house except a couple of gray squirrels playing about over the roof, attributed the noise to them and proceeded, though in a much lowered tone, so her words were indistinguishable to the boys' ears.

"There, she's about finished. She won't tell much more unless she sees another quarter forthcoming," Robert whispered again after a few moments. "She's sending her away now."

"Wants to be sure of the rest of the gang," Billy whispered back. "Who's coming next?"

There was a moment's consultation among the group of girls after Meta joined them, and then Sarah left and came tripping with light steps down the low embankment.

"Hurrah for Sarah! Here's where we learn Sam's fate, too," Billy whispered, giving Sam's foot a sly kick. "Hold your breath, Sam."

"Shut up, Billy, she's commencing and we'll miss something," came from Larry.

The six boys grew motionless, and the gypsy, seeing no cause for alarm, proceeded with less caution. Her words reached them quite clearly.

"You ha' good fortune, too, little lady, ah—yes, I glad to tell you good fortune. You already promised, ain't you, dearie?—yes," as Sarah blushed—"you can't fool gypsy. You lover he give you diamond ring—you be married 'fore Christmas—ain't zat so, lit'le lady? Now ain't zat so? Sure, you knows it's so," shaking her head and laughing till the big earrings jingled. "You be married 'fore Christmas."

"Secret's out, Sam. Why didn't you tell us the date?" whispered Ned. "No use trying to keep it any longer. Sarah's face has given it all away."

"Good young man—fine young man—" the gypsy was saying. Billy reached over and patted him on the shoulder. "He have light hair—like this? No," touching Sarah's reddish brown locks that strayed in coquettish curls out from under the pretty turban. "No, no, not like this, hees hair yellow—[Billy gave a friendly but none too gentle pull at Sam's dingy yellow pompadour] blue eyes—turn-up nose—"

"That's you all right, Sam. No getting round that," said Billy gleefully. "She's got you spotted."

"Sh-h!"

"Your lover he like good things to eat—you no

like to cook—you learn to cook, you be happy—”

“Fritters,” slyly remarked Larry. “Sarah’s got a job cooking for Sam. He only ate six for breakfast.”

“Sh-h!”

“You learn to cook well—he make money—by and by you no’ have to cook. Hees father own store. By and by your lover’s father he die—your lover he get rich. You no’ need to cook zen. He buy you more diamonds zan one. See. You be much happy little lady—”

“Lucky Sam!” Billy interjected again. “All smooth sailing, my boy. Wait, she’s going back. Who next?”

But the irrepressible Billy grew suddenly silent and undemonstrative as he saw Janey leaving the group this time, and however much any of the boys would have scoffed at the idea of a gypsy foretelling the future, or predicting that of good or evil moment, it is unmistakably certain, despite this fact, that two hearts within that old boathouse throbbed considerably faster and two boyish forms grew suspiciously tense and rigid as they strained their ears to hear every word. Ned took one sly glance at both of them and over their heads caught Larry’s knowing wink, and silence profound fell over the eavesdroppers.

“You fine, gentle little lady—got sens’tive, tender lit’le heart—” began the gypsy, scanning the many fine lines traced in the white palm of the slender, dainty hand Janey placed in her rough, dirty, brown



ones. "You no' very strong to bear hard things—you ought not have to—you too gentle for hard ways—just ze same you meet 'em like—like brave, strong man meet 'em—you no' give up. I see you long, long way from home—lots trouble—but you brave, strong lit'le lady. You get sad message.

"You sweet-faced lit'le lady," the gypsy continued, still holding the hand, but with her dark, shrewd eyes watching closely Janey's countenance. "Your face make your fortune. You no' lack for lovers. You find lovers anywhere. If you go east, you find lover. If you go west, you find lover—go south, there'd be lover there. You already gone north—found lover, too—"

"No fake about that," from Sam back of the knot hole, who in turn now patted Billy's shoulder. "Jolly! she's some fortune teller. Believe I'll have her read my palm."

"Keep still," from Ned.

"You bring him back—he follow you—he follow you anywhere—he go to world's ends for you—he handsome fellow—gray eyes—he like run races—he strong—he beat. He got money, too. He make you good husband. You like him—he like you—"

"And live happy ever after," came a whisper from Larry, who was finding it hard to contain himself.

"Sh-h, listen!"

The listeners grew even more tense as the gypsy began again.

"Right at home you find lover. He fine young man, too, but he not like other. He more quiet—

more solemn—not so happy like. He taller—he run races, too. He bigger—he handsome, but not ze same handsome—no—no—he difference. He like you very, very much, but he got no money. You like him, too—” Again the musical laugh of the little gypsy rang out and her gold earrings bobbed in a merry way about her neck.

“Zey both like you—you like both zey—sometimes not know which more—but way down, down deep in you’ lit’le heart, lady, where you don’t tell nobody, you likes one ze best—now ain’t zat so, dearie?”

“I don’t see why I should,” said Janey, smiling. “Which one is it? I’d like to know. You ought to be able to tell, and help me out of the difficulty.”

In the boathouse Robert and Billy were looking straight ahead through their own particular crevices and neither moved a muscle.

“That old lady’s getting mighty close to the heart-strings, I wouldn’t be afraid to bet my hat,” Macy whispered to Ned. “Billy, what makes you so quiet all of a sudden? Got paralyzed?”

“Keep still, blockhead,” came the rather savage response from that young man.

Outside again the gypsy was laughing merrily. “You sly lit’le coquette! I no need to tell you which you like. You know. Gypsy fortune teller know. She knows you like money, an’ fine things—beautiful things—pretty clothes—” Robert’s hand clutched tighter the post to which he was holding—“Yes, you like ’em, and you like him—don’t you, dearie?”

“Why, surely, why shouldn’t I? Money’s a splen-

did thing to have. Don't you think it's an easy choice?" Janey inquired innocently, but she did not suspect how the mischief was dancing in her eyes.

"Ah, lit'le lady, you no' fool the gypsy fortune teller. Ze gypsy know better. You got a heart zat beats as true—you don't marry no man for money. You marry for love—yes, zat so—an' you loves other lover most. Ain't zat so, dearie?"

Robert's fingers loosened their hold on the post and he caught a quick breath. Billy had the sensation of one thrust suddenly under a cold shower bath. Sam Gates gave a chuckle that threatened their disclosure, and Larry immediately threw one hand over his mouth. The gypsy looked cautiously around, but seeing no evident signs of life, went on, but though the two young men most concerned still pressed eyes or ears close to the openings in the wall, in the tumult of emotions they sensed little more of the gypsy's jabberings before Janey rejoined the group.

"It's a shame for Lu to miss all this," Sarah was saying a moment later. "I'd give a dollar to hear what the gypsy'd tell her. She certainly hit mine straight, and Meta's too, and Janey's about as well, I imagine, or she'd tell us what she said."

"Let's go back up the hill while Dora and Madeline are getting theirs told and see if we can't persuade Lu to come," Meta urged.

"S'pos'n we do. I wish I had some more money, I'd get her to tell me some more," said Sarah. "Wouldn't you, Janey?"

"No, I think I've had enough for one time," Janey

replied, "but we can go back and see if we can get Lu to come."

"I think I can coax her to," said Mamie. "Come on; I'll get mine told when I come back."

The four hurried back up the hill. Lu had washed all the dishes except the cooking utensils and had just put them all in order in the little box cupboard in the cook tent, and was now pinning on her hat preparatory to going to the spring for a bucket of water with which to finish up her work when the girls burst upon her excitedly.

"You big goosies!" Lu declared with unflattering candor as they finished a more or less incoherent and jumbled recital of their adventures. "What a credulous bunch you are. Of course she could tell. Anybody could read Sarah's face like a newspaper, and with that little red crease on the third finger of her left hand, why, it wouldn't take a gypsy to discover that a ring had just been removed."

"But how could she guess at all the other things?" argued Sarah. "It's just perfectly wonderful the things she told us, Lu. I wish you'd come and see for yourself. I *know* she told some things straight."

"The color of Sam's eyes and hair, for instance," said Meta.

"Do come on," urged Mamie. "Suppose we don't believe it. It's bushels of fun, anyway."

"You've missed half your life till you've had your fortune told," added Meta.

"All right, I will," said Lu, with such sudden and



good-natured acquiescence the girls were amazed. "Just wait a minute till I get ready."

"Why, you're all ready as you are. Just take your apron off and come along. Gypsies are not especially stylish," laughed Sarah, delighted that they had won her over so soon.

"No, I'm not ready. For once I shall give special attention to dressing. You may go on back if you wish and I'll come later. Only you're not by word or look to give me away. I'm going to prove to you girls that that gypsy can't tell any more about your future, or your present, for that matter, than I can. First, Sarah, your mother has gone with my mother and Mamie's to the other side of the lake in a boat, and so I shall ask you if I may have that old black and white check dress of hers that she wore around the camp in the rain Tuesday and got all muddy."

"Hardly necessary to ask—of course you can have it. But what in the world do you want it for?"

"Wait and see. If you are not going back right now you may help me if you will. Never mind the pans and kettles. I'll finish them when we get back. You may lend me all your aid. For once I shall require the assistance of maids in dressing. Mamie, will you hunt up that old pair of slippers of your mother's? They're a little large, but will be just the thing; and, Janey, mother's shawl is hanging somewhere behind that curtain. That's it; now for a long petticoat."

"What are you going to do?" queried two or three of the girls in amazement, but obeying orders.

"Going to fool the gypsy, and at the same time

show what fools you girls have made of yourselves," replied Lu, coolly, pulling on an old black petticoat that nearly touched the ground and next proceeding to don the black and white check dress of Mrs. McEllman's. "Somebody bring me a little water in the washbasin, and Meta, hand me mother's bottle of gum arabic from the cupboard shelf."

"For conscience' sake, what are you going to do with it?" exclaimed the wondering girls.

"Plaster my hair down tight," Lu replied carelessly, letting down her long braids and undoing them with quick fingers. "Now for some wire hairpins," as she parted it in the middle of her forehead and proceeded to "plaster" it tightly down to her head. "There, give it a corkscrew twist, Janey. Now, don't I look ten years older than I did five minutes ago?"

"You certainly do," exclaimed Janey, looking with dismay at the transformation. "Lu, you look dreadful."

"Just a little dash of dirt now on my neck, and a trifle of that lamp black to darken underneath my eyes will be an added improvement," Lu said, surveying herself in the glass quite unconcernedly. "Don't be horrified, sister; I shall not adopt this style of dress permanently. Fortunately my hands are yet red from the dishwater, which shows I am a working woman and accustomed to household duties instead of a mere schoolgirl like the rest of you. Now for the fun. Please warn the other girls as soon as you have a chance, and when you see me coming get

away far enough so she won't suspect I have any connection with you whatever."

"Well, you surely are a fright!" exclaimed Mamie, doubling up with laughter as Lu trailed off down the hill and then turned off to one side from the road leading to the boat landing. "I should never know her in the world, girls, if I hadn't seen her dress up myself."

The girls laughed till their sides ached, and it was no wonder. Lu was such a ridiculous picture. The old black and white check dress dragged the ground at the back, a great rent was on one side of the skirt, and it was drabbled and soiled. Too long in the waist, it bloused over the belt slouchily, while more than all, her long brown hair, drawn tightly back and fastened with half a dozen hairpins into a corkscrew knot, had changed her whole appearance.

"Such sillies!" the girl was saying to herself as she stepped over a fallen log and gave her skirt an impatient twitch to release it from a stubby limb. Lu despised long skirts. They gave her a feeling of imprisonment. "I wouldn't hamper myself with clothes like this day in and day out for a fortune; but I suppose it becomes necessary that I make a martyr of myself in order to teach these foolish young things a lesson."

By dint of much perseverance and many encounters with fallen twigs and briars that caught and pulled at her skirts, Lu reached the bottom of the hill and the road which encircled the lake. Through the open space she caught sight of the boat landing,

the gypsy, and one of the girls, the others returning toward the boathouse along the road. Just then a loud, plaintive cry issued from somewhere among the bushes at her left and a childish voice wailed:

"Oh, I want my mamma, I do—I want my mamma! Boo-hoo—oh, dear, I want my mamma."

Lu quickly slipped over another large log that lay in her way, frantically disentangled her skirts from a thorny brush heap, and ran toward the low bushes from which the sound proceeded. A diminutive, pathetic looking little urchin of about two or three years of age, in blue calico frock, with face besmeared with dust and dirt, traced through by tiny rivulets of tears, a tousled shock of tow-colored hair crowning a troubled little head, and grimy hand rubbing swollen, tear-wet eyes, was what met her astonished gaze.

"What's the matter, honey pet? Are you lost?" Lu dropped down beside the little blue-frocked urchin and patted him gently.

"I want my mamma," sobbed the child again, but comforted by her presence snuggled his dusty little head against her shoulder. "My mamma gone off. I can't find her."

"Which way did she go, sweetheart? Shall I help you hunt her?" Lu, all sympathy, gathered him into her arms, dirt and all, forgetful of everything else but the sorrows of the baby.

"That way," the child made answer, pointing down the road that curved around the lake to the boat landing. "Mamma gone that way."



"Then don't cry. We'll find her pretty soon. I'll help you hunt her—bother this old dress!" pulling it out of her way and wiping the child's dirty face with his dirtier apron. "Suppose we go now and look for her, shall we?"

"All yight; let's go," agreed the child joyfully. Then reaching up his arms he put them about Lu's neck and kissed her cheek. "I like 'oo," he cooed.

She helped him out from among the tangle of brier bushes and led him to the smooth, sandy road, stopping once or twice to pick a thorn from his foot, and hand in hand they strolled along the road, Lu expecting every instant to come upon a frantic mother in search of a lost baby.

"Yes, dearie, you been in lots of danger," the gypsy was saying to Mamie, for the girls had lost no time in getting back. "I see you one time in great danger—good fellow pull you out. He save you. He save you to happy life—not all happy—you see some trouble—lit'le maybe. Much happy, too. You find lover some day when you go away. You 'quainted wiz he now, only you don't know he be lover. Your mother she ha' lots trouble—more'n you ever have. But you ha' some. You gi' me more money. I tell you 'bout it. No? Ah, missy ought to know 'bout danger. You need gypsy to tell you how 'void it—No? Better yes. You want to find out some day. Gypsy fortune teller won't be here zen."

"But I haven't any more money with me," said Mamie. "Maybe the girls have some. You wait till I run over and see."

"All right. I wait."

There was a short silence while Mamie ran up the bank to where the other girls were. In the old boathouse there was a slight stir.

"Let's yell," said Larry, "and startle the old woman out of her senses if she's got any, before Mamie gets back and wastes another perfectly good quarter."

"No, don't. Keep still till we're sure of having all the fun out of it there's going to be. I wouldn't have missed this for a farm," Ned whispered back.

"Guess it will be memorable enough to suit even Sarah," put in Macy. "By the way, Sam, there's no getting round it, you've got to invite us to the wedding."

"Treats, give us the treats, Sam," from Macy.

"Listen, there comes somebody else down the road," Sam announced, more anxious to divert their attention from himself than from any sense of curiosity as to the newcomer. "Who is it?"

"I don't know. Some country frau, I judge," answered Billy. "Say, but she's some looker, ain't she? And the youngster looks like if he ever had a bath he took it in the swill pail."

As a matter of fact Lu, coming around the bend in view of the old boathouse at that instant, had, for the time being, almost forgotten about the gypsy, so absorbed was she in her search for the lost baby's parent. She might even have been oblivious to her own ridiculous garb had it not been for the slipshod old shoes which threatened to fall off with each step,

and the troublesome long skirt. The child, clinging to her hand, had ceased its sobbing and was cooing a contented little song, the while giving an occasional stamp with one or the other of its small, bare, brown feet, to make an impression of its toes in the warm sand. Up on the little hillock the girls gave one simultaneous exclamation, clapped their hands and handkerchiefs to their mouths, and dropped with one accord on the grass behind the low bushes. Mamie, having used the money ruse to make her escape to gasp out under her breath between bursts of muffled laughter: "Oh, girls, I got away just in time! I never could have stood it if she—if she had happened along before I got away. I'd have died to laugh in spite of myself."

"Where on earth did she pick up that frightfully dirty youngster?" gasped Janey.

"The disguise is sure complete," answered Sarah, with a giggle that threatened to awaken suspicion.

But the gypsy, alert for a new victim of her magic arts, lost no time.

"Your fortune, my lady? Gypsy tell your fortune? You need gypsy to tell you good fortune. You not happy. You in trouble. Cross gypsy's palm—she tell you things you want to know. Fine leetle child that. Bea-u-tiful baby. Look like hees mother. Let gypsy tell your fortune?—eh, yes?

Somewhat taken aback by the phenomenal success of her disguise (for it may be noted that in the secrecy of her own mind the girl had had grave doubts of the result of her undertaking), Lu's

gravity was now so nearly upset as to almost incapacitate her for the further performance of the difficult role she had undertaken to play. Not knowing what else to do in this startling emergency, she stooped low in pretense of brushing dirt which was by no means imaginary, from the child's apron, endeavoring on the instant to gather her scattered forces and restore innocence and gravity to her countenance. When she again raised her head slowly she fumbled in her pocket for a moment, and taking from it a quarter, placed it in the gypsy's palm.

"Yes, kind gypsy," she murmured in a subdued tone, and dropping her eyelids to hide the mischief, "here is the money—tell me a good fortune. And please—will you tell me where my husband is?"

The low tone, the drooping of the long lashes, served the double purpose of hiding Lu's inward mirth and deceiving the old gypsy into believing them to be marks of sorrow and trouble, and excitedly and eagerly she caught at the bait the girl had so cunningly thrown out.

"You in trouble, poor lady. You man gone left you? You in dreadful trouble! Poor, poor lady," shaking the head and sighing. "Your man bad wicked man to go off and leave sweet lady and lit'le boy. He done left you, dearie? It good thing you come to gypsy. Gypsy woman tell you what to do. She help you out of trouble."

A big brown toad, hopping across the road at that instant, the child loosened its hold of Lu's hand and



set off at once for the purpose of making an investigation of this queer, warty specimen of animal life.

"Can't you please tell me?" and Lu, to evade the gypsy's keen look, turned her eyes out toward the lake, her voice carrying thus straight to the six pairs of listening ears in the old boathouse. "Won't you please," insistently, "tell me where my husband is?"

"By gracious, fellows, it's Lu!" ejaculated Billy in an undertone, the first to recognize her voice. "Shades of night, she's trying to fool the old hag!"

A low exclamation escaped from the lips of each one of the boys as they in turn recognized her.

"Making a good job of it, too, or I'll eat my hat," declared Sam Gates. "Say, boys, this is the richest thing yet."

"Nothing gullible about Lu," said Ned, with brotherly pride. "She's in for showing the girls it's all a fake, and you can always bank on her doing anything up right and proper when she goes at it. She'll fool that old gypsy to a finish—look at her——"

"Sh-h!"

Silence again, smothered, breathless silence in the old boathouse. The gypsy went on:

"You ha' heaps o' trouble, ain't you, dearie? Your man he have trouble in business. He no' like it. He go 'way. Aint zat so, dearie? You like him. He no' leave you 'cause he no' like you. He discouraged. He meet losses. Ain't zat so, dearie, now ain't zat so?"

"Some doubts there," murmured Billy. "You bit too quick, old lady; no getting out of it now. You have swallowed bait, hook, and all."

"Better dash for the driftwood, Mrs. Earrings," was Ned's suggestive whisper.

"Why, you say it's so," Lu was answering with some difficulty, "but—but," lowering her voice again, "I would like so much to know where he is now. Can't you tell me that?"

"Oh, he gon 'way," said the gypsy hastily, "yes, he gone 'way—but not very far—no, not very. He discouraged and worried over hees business. He no' like your people very well. They make trouble. But he come back fin'ly. He like you anyway. Some day he strike fortune—make lots money—zen he come back—bring money an' fine things, buy nice home—make you very happy again. Get you lots beau-u-tiful things—lacy curtains—ribbons—yes, he come back again. Poor lady mustn't grieve."

"How long must I wait?" Lu asked, endeavoring to mold her expression into one of such patient resignation and waiting as to nearly cause an uncontrollable outburst from the boys.

"Oh, not so very long time—one year, maybe two—maybe he wait three. But he come back sure—not longer zan three years he wait. You do well to ask ze gypsy lady. You give her more silver, she tell you a lot more you ought to know."

Lu shook her head. "No more money, gypsy lady," she said, smiling in spite of herself. "You've

told me enough so I think I can wait very well till he comes or I find him."

"Ze gypsy lady she give you full life reading—only one dollar—heap good things she tell you. You husband he come back, an'—an' you be very happy, but you must heed what gypsy tell you—might miss all ze happiness if you don't find out what gypsy lady knows. You pay her dollar, she tell you everything."

"No, no, gypsy," Lu protested, moving back, "I haven't any more money for you. Besides I think you've told me all I need to know. I really believe after your telling me this I can get along very nicely." She was laughing outright.

"It's very encouraging I must say—no, no more money to-day. I must be going——"

Suddenly within the old boathouse there arose a chorus of yells equal to the war whoop of a dozen Comanches, and six boys in muddy bathing suits, tumbled over each other in promiscuous fashion down through the inner entrance and into the clear waters of the lake. Two frightened squirrels sprang from the boathouse roof to the nearest limb that offered means of escape, and never stopped till they had reached safety in the very top of the great cottonwood. A startled gypsy made haste for her camp, her red scarf trailing behind, earrings bobbing angrily, and her lips muttering imprecations and threats. Peals of girlish laughter rang out from the neighborhood of the bushes on the low hillock, while the dismayed Lu, dropping the loose shoes from her feet, and gathering the detested skirts in both hands,

fled back along the road in dire chagrin and confusion. Even the warty toad took alarm and hopped with all speed to the shelter of an old decayed stump. Only a bewildered childish figure in dirty blue calico frock, looking first one way and then another with wondering, innocent eyes at all this commotion, was left on the scene. Finding himself left thus alone, his face began to pucker into pathetic contortions; then, as if thinking better of the matter, he sat down and played contentedly in the sand, until down the road came a stout, red-faced woman in blue calico dress, a counterpart in color and pattern of the frock worn by the child, minus neither dirt nor patches, and with the not altogether gentle persuasiveness of a little willow switch induced him to return with her to a small cabin set back among the trees.



## CHAPTER 20

## AN INFORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT

**H**ELLO, LU! Found that recreant husband yet?" Billy hailed her teasingly, heading the others as they came straggling up the hill to the cook tent at noontime.

Lu was once more her usual picture of neatness, immaculate in a clean blue gingham dress and white apron, with her hair carefully arranged, though straying wisps of the brown locks would rebelliously escape from their fastenings and curl bewitchingly about the white neck and forehead. The cheeks were flushed and rosy pink just now, and the bright eyes were still sparkling with excitement.

"Given it up. What's the use? Besides he's not worth it anyhow," she retorted, flying from camp fire to cook table to drain the potatoes, and commencing to exercise the potato masher in a series of rhythmic thumps. "If he has to be gone two or three years, there is no use bothering about him for the present, and I am better occupied spending my time getting my own bread and butter."

"Poor lady, mustn't grieve!" Billy mimicked the gypsy with such indescribable drollery as to set the entire group off in a peal of merriment. "He not very far away—no, not very. He worried over hees troubles; but he come back fin'lly. Let gypsy tell

you more. Tell you some things little lady ought to know," he urged, coaxingly.

"Oh, *do* go away," Lu protested in some embarrassment, and raising the potato masher in a threatening manner, which Billy dodged with mock concern. "How can you expect a body to get dinner ready with you bothering like this?"

"Is that the way you treated him? No wonder he was unhappy, poor man, if you threatened to throw potato mashers at him. He perhaps wasn't accustomed to such treatment; but say," Billy went on, keeping an eye on guard as to the whereabouts of Lu's weapon while he straightened out one of the brown locks which curled over her ear, "how in the name of conscience did you ever get these all flattened out and pasted down in that stick-'em-tight fashion?"

"Just a little magic art of my own, a pull and a twist, and presto change!" replied Lu, bending her head out of his reach, and stopping her exertions for a moment to pour some cream into the kettle of potatoes. "Want me to try it again?"

"No, no—you may leave the magic art alone if it works like that. Think I have a decided preference for this style of hairdressing." Billy was looking down at her with a half-amused, half-abstracted expression. "Lu, you'd make a veritable Cinderella."

"Yes, I have been able to find but one of my borrowed shoes," the girl agreed, "but I lacked the pumpkin and the rats."

"Of course the prince will bring the shoe back," said Robert, who with one of the other boys was at one side filling up the large wash basins preparatory to plunging sunburned faces and hands into the refreshing water.

"Or rather that vagrant husband," laughed Billy. "When he returns, Lu, let us know. We'll come to the banquet, for of course you'll prepare one in his honor with some of that money he's to bring," he added tantalizingly, pulling another curl out over her cheek.

"Will you let me alone? If you haven't anything else to do you may mash these potatoes," said the girl, putting the curl back in place and promptly transferring the potato masher into his hand. "You may just as well be useful as otherwise. Something's burning, I do believe."

"I like your dinner dress much better than your morning attire, Lu," remarked Larry, who was drying his tousled head with a big crash towel as Lu darted past him on her way to Sarah's aid. "You're some costumer, though. You'd make money designing——"

"Say, girls, make Sam invite us all to the wedding," Billy interrupted, pausing in the operation of leisurely wielding the potato masher. "He and Sarah might fittingly and properly turn this last day of our social gathering into an announcement party."

"That we could, with very good grace, if we chose to, and with more certainty than it appears to be in

the case of some others," Sam retorted with the effect of silencing Billy for a full three minutes.

"What about it, Janey?" queried Macy, daringly.

Janey's face wore an inscrutable look, but before she had time to answer, with brotherly consideration Ned intervened: "Well, if the old gypsy hit the truth in Janey's case as nearly as she did in Lu's, I think there are a few guesses coming yet." At which remark one young man's face brightened perceptibly and another's fell.

"It's all a fake. Didn't I tell the girls so before? Anyhow, Lu, you have the credit of duping the gypsy, and I'm glad we have one sensible girl in the crowd," said Macy.

"Do hurry, boys and girls, I'm hungry as a wolf," cried Larry. "It's been six hours since breakfast and I've almost forgotten what a fritter tastes like."

"Well, it's ready," said Lu, coming back with the bread and a dish of beans for the table, "as soon as Billy gets the potatoes dished up."

"Do I have to do that, too?" asked that young man. "I thought I was only to do the pounding act. How do you go at it? Pour 'em out?"

"Here's a spoon, and don't daub them over the sides of the dish," cautioned his adviser.

"In harmony with Billy's suggestion," Sam began suddenly in the first lull that came in the conversation when the group were seated around the table, "since the fates and the gypsy conspire to tell tales on us, and the crowd won't give us any peace, my fair fiancée and I have decided that we may as well



announce to our overcurious friends that the momentous date is set for November 30.

"Whew!" ejaculated Larry.

"Oh, oh!" giggled Meta.

"I told you the gypsy could tell," cried Dora.

"I say we owe this one a debt of gratitude," remarked Macy.

"No, no," cautioned Billy, sagely, "think of all the debts we must incur by reason of wedding presents. How rash we were in precipitating this upon our heads."

"Always the finances," laughed Robert.

"Too late to retract now," declared Sam, complacently. "Sarah and I shall expect nothing less than real silver and cut glass."

"Plenty of that around our yard," put in Larry. "I cut my hand on a piece of it last week."

"Larry!" said his sister, reprovingly.

"Well, well," exclaimed Billy, suddenly, "we've all been so excited over Sam's announcement we've nearly forgotten to respond with our congratulations to this happy couple. Here's to them both. Long may they live to enjoy the fulfillment of the gypsy's prediction (however preposterous it may appear) of Sarah's good cooking and Sam's diamonds."

Merry shouts and long-continued applause followed Billy's toast. It subsided after a few moments and the conversation was suddenly turned into more sober channels by a reflection upon Ned's part.

"There's just one thing about this affair that I don't understand," he began seriously, as he took a

plentiful helping of beans. "How could the gypsy hit things so well in some instances and then fly so wide of the mark in others? Either some one has given her a clew or there is something magic or supernatural about it. I don't see how she could make up all that stuff, and if she *can* discern and predict, why doesn't she do it right straight through?"

"Mind reading," suggested one.

"Well, she made a frightful failure of it in Lu's case," said Ned.

"I believe the solution is easy enough," said Mrs. Clayton, feeling it was an opportune time for her to speak, "and do you know I think Lu has helped us to learn a very valuable lesson, if we but take note of it.

"God, for a wise purpose, known to himself," she went on, "has veiled our future. It is better that we should not know what that future holds for us except that which he chooses to reveal of his own accord and in his way. Enoch by his great faith was able to look down through the years and the centuries, even seeing the working out of events to the end of time. He received his knowledge of the future through the only true and rightful source, that of God himself. The record tells us of circumstances where men in olden times because of sin were deprived of the privilege they had enjoyed of communion with God and turned to sorcery and witchcraft for their information. You will notice, too, that oftentimes they got the truth; but while the Evil One may be able to predict truthfully some things, you will nearly always

discover that he so mixes falsehood with it as to confuse and mystify, in consequence making the deception all the greater."

"But do you really think Satan has anything to do with a gypsy's fortune telling?" asked Sarah in some awe.

"Not necessarily; he may or he may not. One is not always able to determine," Mrs. Clayton replied. "But whether he has or has not, we are at least sure of this much, the source of her power, whatever it may be, is not from God, for it is not given in his appointed way nor by his sanction."

"Goodness, if I thought Satan had anything to do with it, I'd never have mine told again," said Meta, her eyes widening.

"I have no doubt but what he avails himself of every means that can assist him in his purpose," said Mrs. Clayton; "it is perhaps only to a very limited extent in this case. The gypsy, once striking a clew, by her own shrewdness in watching a countenance, can easily follow it, and with surprising success. Whatever she tells must be either through evil or by her own cunning. It cannot be from God."

"Do you think there is any danger or harm in it, Mrs. Clayton?" asked Janey.

"Only so far as anything which is misleading may be harmful and dangerous. We should not give it credence, and we are not so safe when we meddle with such things, since they are apt to create doubt and confusion in the mind."

The entire group grew serious and thoughtful as they discussed it for a time, and the lesson sank deeper in the hearts of some than they manifested; but the bubbling spirits of youth do not long remain in repression and the conversation soon drifted again to lighter topics.

There was not a moment lost or wasted that afternoon. Every precious, golden one was filled with wholesome recreation. Not till the sun sank low in the west did they begin the work of gathering together and packing their camping outfits, and the return trip home was made "by the light of the silvery moon," as Billy had decreed.



## CHAPTER 21

### "ACCORDING AS IT IS WRITTEN"

**I**N EVERY local organization of the church there is a vital force which, properly energized and wisely directed, may accomplish much good and make its influence widely felt in the vicinity. Centralizing its energy and uniting its efforts, it may make itself a more potent factor in the erecting of high ideals and standards than can any other local organization. None can excel it in its far-reaching influence, for the reason that back of it ever stands the divine wisdom and power ready to indorse and multiply its efforts. Backed by this potent force, united under it, receiving its sanction and support, it may become invincible in its strength, which no power raised against it shall be able to overthrow.

Such can only be true in the full sense with a branch of God's church when its members are united, when they are ready to stand, with purpose unselfish, shoulder to shoulder, and with hearts inclined to hearken to the commandments, commandments long since inscribed by the prophets of old, reiterated from time to time by the Lord's servants in latter times, and daily confirmed in the hearts of his faithful ones by the voice of the Spirit as it breathes its quiet whisperings to the inner consciousness.

On the other hand, it is also just as true, that

wherever there is this centralized power and effort, there also will the enemy strike his heaviest blows. Men engaged in military warfare understand well this principle, but in the sense of security which numbers bring, we are apt to lose sight of this fact in our spiritual warfare. The enemy seeks always to discover the strongholds, to reach within and confuse, distract, scatter, knowing well that by so doing he has traveled a long way towards victory.

In the constant battle that is being waged between the forces of right and truth and those of sin and error, the situation is much the same. Whenever a good work is undertaken or begun, the enemy with his unseen forces literally encamps round about, and so long as he can be kept without, so long as the gates are securely barred and the walls fortified, there is safety; but let a bar be left down or a gate unlocked, and he be allowed to slip in and stir up discord, suspicion, dissension, doubt, within the stronghold, there is cause for alarm; for though all the hosts of evil may not prevail against a loyal and faithful band, yet if disunited and disloyal to its commander, it is soon in peril.

Love for God and for each other is enjoined upon us in the two great commandments upon which, Christ said, hinge all other laws, and if as branches and individual members of branches we took time at oft-stated periods to stop and scrutinize self and make a consistent effort to be obedient to these two commandments, the petty differences, foolish back-bitings, and unchristianlike envyings and malice

might be banished from our midst and Satan's power be held in check.

To none other of the members are these facts more evident than to the pastor. No one else can realize as he, the necessity of all the members working together. More keenly than anyone else he senses the harm that is done by the petty jealousies or the dishonest acts, the little discords, and the magnitude of their results. And however some of the members may consider it, the position of a pastor is not an easy one to fill. Too often he is made the target of unjust remark, of scathing criticism, or charged with sinister motives, and his counsel and admonition regarded indifferently, or even with scorn.

Robert's experience in branch work was not altogether an exception to the rule. The branch was new, the majority of its members but recently baptized, were without experience; complications and perplexities arose from time to time, and matters had to be adjusted which required wisdom and tact, while petty little faultfindings, arising seemingly from nowhere and out of nothing, had their share in its history. Nevertheless, the young man's humble devotion to his Master's cause, his strong, sympathetic nature (which while carrying with it dignity was devoid of unseemly pomp or pride), and his deep, sincere love for humanity, combined a rare personality which easily won its way into the confidence and hearts of his flock as to achieve extraordinary success.

There was little chance in Banforth to accomplish

much outside of the branch because of prejudice; but wherever a country schoolhouse or church afforded an opportunity for presenting the gospel message to the people, Robert was quick to take advantage of it. These appointments often necessitated long rides, sometimes alone, at other times accompanied by Janey, or Mamie, or both. On these occasions he frequently asked the girls to take notebook and pencil along.

"Just to jot down a note here and there," he said one evening as they were leaving the brown cottage, "and if I make an error in point of doctrine or use of language, give me the benefit of your criticisms. I need them, and that's the way to make improvement."

"Promise you won't take offense?" Janey asked, half jestingly, as he helped her and Mamie into the buggy. "I thought we were supposed to commend a minister for his efforts instead of criticize."

"You'll find it the much safer policy," observed Lu, who came running down to the gate at that moment with the forgotten lap robe. "I tried to act the part of a critic with Deacon Rugby once and it didn't work. I wasn't very old at that time and Ned had just read to me the story of 'Merlin's Necklace.' I had a string of white beads and there lacked two or three of being enough to reach around my neck. I wanted some more badly, and thought maybe if I'd tell a lot of truths the strand would grow longer, like the little girl's in the story. I started out on Deacon Rugby, as I thought he needed



some truths told him more than anybody I knew about. I felt really in earnest about the matter, but I wanted to be diplomatic, too, so I told the deacon that I thought his sermons would be just splendid if he didn't make them so awfully long; and lovely, only they were rather dry; but that I *did* think people would like 'em better if he'd tell a little more about what the *Lord* did for folks and less about what he did himself."

"Why, Lu!" exclaimed Janey in dismay, as Robert and Mamie laughed outright, "whenever did you say such things as that to the deacon?"

"Oh, several years ago," Lu replied, tucking the lap robe comfortably about her sister's feet. "It was very impertinent for a little girl, I must admit, though I was perfectly sincere in the act at the time. I've grown wiser, for the strand never added one bead, and the deacon didn't seem to appreciate it at all. In fact, I don't think he likes me to this day. The next Sunday after that he preached on 'The disrespectfulness of the rising generation.'"

"I should have thought he would!" laughed Robert, as he climbed into the buggy. "Rest assured, Lu, I'll not ask you to be *my* critic."

Lu nodded sagely. "I'll guarantee I can do better at it than either of those two," she called after them.

"I think I'll take the risk of your criticisms anyhow," Robert remarked earnestly as they drove on. "Seriously, I must study to show myself approved, 'a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.' Christ gave to us the best he had, and he deserves in return

the best service we can give him. I want to make every word I utter count for him, that I may give him the best of everything at my command, and my words may be blameless in his sight. If I do not give him my best I am unworthy to be his servant."

"I am sure it is the only right way," Janey replied. "If we were to promise to work for any company or firm in the ordinary affairs of business life they would expect us to render efficient service. How much more painstaking ought we to be when doing special work for Him!"

Sometimes when an appointment was made a considerable distance from town, Billy took Robert and a load of young people out in the car and the occasion became a merry, sociable one. One of these times occurred on a particularly fine autumn morning when the roads were in perfect condition and the landscape was one mass of variegated foliage, mingled shades of browns and greens and gold, with here and there a tall old veteran of the forest resplendently festooned in the scarlet ivy. Mr. Grayson, always anxious to find a new place where the gospel might be presented, and unable that week to get the use of the church or schoolhouse near his home, bethought himself of a certain out-of-the-way country church some fifteen miles southeast of Banforth, had obtained permission for a preaching service the following Sunday morning, and Robert had consented to fill it.

There was no appointment for services at home that morning and since the Sunday school was to

be held in the afternoon, Billy took Ned and his sisters, and Robert and Mamie out in the car. It was a charming, rustic little country church, set well back on the slope of a hill, sheltered by sturdy oaks, and rendered picturesque by wild vines, which clambered with unrestrained freedom over wall and chimney and low-sagging roof.

Our friends arrived a little early, for Sunday school was still in session, and as quietly as possible they went in and waited for the dismissal. Slowly, however, it dragged along, and the time for Robert to occupy came and passed. Still the superintendent manifested no intention of dismissal. Twenty minutes past the time and the benediction was leisurely and with apparent reluctance pronounced. Immediately Robert took his place in the pulpit, determined that it would not be his fault if they did not hear a sermon that morning.

From the songbooks which were scattered about in the seats, a familiar hymn was selected and the meeting opened. Prayer was offered, and at the conclusion of another hymn Robert opened the Bible and proceeded to read various portions of the Scriptures as a foundation for his discourse. It was at this point the congregation chose to show their disapproval of any sermon or denomination that might be classed as unorthodox and, save the group who had come with Robert and a single exception among their own number, rising in a body, they filed slowly and majestically out of the building into the yard, where

by carriage and afoot they soon dispersed and disappeared from view in various directions. The "single exception" was a man who had fallen asleep while the first words of the text were being read, and he now remained entirely unconscious of his surroundings, head leaning against the back of the pew, and open mouth emitting a series of well-measured snores.

Quite naturally Robert's sermon was a brief one that morning, while but partially repressed smiles played about the features of his youthful audience. Fifteen minutes before the hands of the clock reached the noon hour they arose to sing the doxology, and the voices of the half dozen singers breaking suddenly upon his ears, the man awoke with a start, looked around the church in a half frightened way, and seeing that all his brethren and friends had departed, leaving him alone in the company of deluded strangers, reached for his hat and made a hurried exit. The young people left in the church found it difficult to remain sober during the benediction.

"Didn't even wait to tell how he enjoyed the sermon," Ned remarked, when at last they laughed and discussed the matter freely.

"I fancy you can't tell what the text is yourself, Ned," challenged Mamie.

"That's a fact," said Ned, scratching his head. "Begging your pardon, Robert, but the side attractions were distracting. Besides, I didn't know but what they were going to mob us for a little while."

"Peaceable enough," said Billy. "All they wanted



to do was to show us what they didn't want; but the innocent old sleeper has carried away more of the sermon than he is aware."

"Billy, what was that you did with his sleeve?" asked Lu suspiciously.

"Nothing harmful at all. I only pinned a paper there for his future profit and instruction."

"And what instruction, pray, was on it?"

"Only a verse of Robert's scripture reading."

"For goodness' sake, what was the verse?" exclaimed Mamie.

"This eminently fitting one, Mamie: 'According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this day.' "

## CHAPTER 22

## IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

IN THE early autumn Billy was appointed by the church authorities as bishop's agent of the district in which Banforth was located, and he and Robert became still more closely associated in matters connected with the branch. Unlike as they were in many ways, this fact seemed only to draw them together and cement their friendship. Nevertheless, while Billy loved no one else in the world, save one, so much as Robert, in one respect there was no one else whom he so much feared. And if for this reason he withheld all confidences concerning Janey, other subjects were discussed heart to heart, and no perplexing matter of branch or Sunday school or problem of daily life arose with one which was not shared by the other.

Soon after his appointment, the two with youthful zeal began to talk of the prospects of raising funds with which to buy a lot and build a church at once. A hall or public building of any kind was not available for their use in the town without great expense, and the feasibility of building was considered. Doubtless their plans might have been projected at once had it not been for the wise counsel of Mrs. Clayton, whose experience and wisdom showed her it would be folly to venture such an undertaking at this juncture.

"I think it would be better to wait a little while, boys," she advised. "Remember, all the families of the Saints here are poor, except Farmer Grayson; lumber is high, a good location will cost quite a sum, and we have no one in the branch who is capable of going ahead and superintending the construction."

"But the park will soon be closed," argued Robert, "and when it turns cold we shall have no place to meet except in our homes."

"And you know, Mother Clayton," Billy added, "people don't like to come to cottages for preaching services. A hall or a church or a public place is the only way to get them out."

"I know, boys," she replied, "but sometimes it is better to go a little slowly than to plunge. The time is short now until cold weather will begin. You boys are both as busy as you can possibly be, and would have no extra time to work on it yourselves, and our family has but little money, to say nothing of the others. Robert, we know, is not situated so he can do anything in a financial way at present, and I do think it would not be wise for the few of us to go deeply in debt as such an undertaking would necessitate. You know the Lord does not sanction that kind of proceeding, and has advised more than once in such things. Let us move a little more slowly, and do the best we can with what we have. We can begin collecting and working at once, and perhaps even buy the lot, but let us wait to build until we have more funds on hand. The Lord will bless our efforts if we are careful to heed his advice."

Wise counsel, as both young men soon recognized, and were glad they had listened. Years afterwards, when Robert's experience had widened and his vision broadened, he looked back upon that time and wondered more than once how much of the success of that year's work he could rightfully claim, for in addition to the divine aid that was afforded him, there was ever back of him in the time of difficulty the spiritual stay and strength, the wisdom and caution of that wonderful mother, whose faith never wavered and whose love for the cause of her Master was an abiding one.

Things moved along smoothly enough till late in the fall, when, with the advent of a new family into their midst, complications began to arise which threatened to disturb their peace and tranquillity. The family came from a distant part of the State. Contrary to the established rule of the church, which requires that when members go from one branch to another, the letters of removal shall be sent by the authorities of one to the clerk or president of the other, these people carried their letters and presented them of their own accord. The little branch in Banforth accepted them without any question, rejoicing in this increase of their number and, as they trusted, added spiritual strength.

Mr. Midsby, the head of this family, was rather short in stature, with an inclination towards stoutness of figure, shoulders that drooped heavily, and a slouching, uncertain gait, that resembled more the shambling shuffle of a grizzly than it did the up-



right, resolute stride of a man. His clothes were ill-fitting and often untidy. His eyes, small and deep-set under heavy, dark brows, carried a sharp, and at times, even a crafty expression. His family were all of that mild, passive type who followed meekly whither he led, without protest or complaint, and accounted his words as law and gospel. Far from exhibiting any evidences of passivity, Mr. Midsby was exceedingly loquacious and aggressive. He had been a member of the church a long time, and having been ordained a priest some years before, no sooner was he a member of the Banforth Branch than he declared his right to exercise his authority in such capacity, and endeavored to push himself forward wherever opportunity offered. His unpleasant personality had a disquieting and unrestful effect upon the other members, who at first, because of his pretensions, had looked up to him as one who would be a great helper. Robert, sincere always in his own actions, free from hypocrisy, and altogether clean in habits, was not quick to suspect his fellow man and brother. He therefore welcomed him into their midst in full fellowship, gladly according him the right to occupy as priest, feeling that such help would be a boon indeed.

It was not long, however, till he began to have frequent misgivings which he felt to keep to himself. To Billy he gave the credit of first piercing the thin veil of false piety with which the man endeavored to hide his real nature. Billy's experience with the world, with men and money matters, and his situa-

tion in the bank gave him an advantage in this respect.

"There's something wrong about that fellow, Robert!" he confided one day, a few weeks after the Midsbys had moved into town. The two were walking down the street toward Robert's home after working hours. "Somehow I've felt all along that he's not just what he sets himself up to be. He's a trifle too officious for one thing, and I fear he's not quite as conscientious about paying his bills as a man should be."

"I can hardly believe anything very bad about him," Robert said thoughtfully, "yet I must admit that some things he has done are not at all according to my liking, and," he added reluctantly, "he is altogether too boastful."

"Aside from some reports coming into the bank that look a bit dubious for his honesty, I have still another suspicion which, if proven true," said Billy, "will disqualify him as a priest."

"What's that?" asked Robert.

"Well, I'm not dead sure, of course, and we wouldn't want to say anything without more evidence than I have; but the other day while he was writing out a check at the side desk, stepping over to replace some pens in the rack and leave a pad of deposit slips, I caught a strong odor of tobacco on his breath. I am reasonably certain he uses it. As a matter of fact, his whole appearance indicated anything but cleanliness, and it strikes me, Robert, that

a man trying to occupy in the priesthood ought to be a little more particular."

"You are right," Robert agreed. "A man has no right to expect that he shall stand before the people and teach gospel principles, and not make an honest endeavor to comply with them himself. The fact of his trying to conceal the habit appears worse to me than the habit itself. But," he added more anxiously, "I can see at once it is not going to be an easy matter to handle. The man is much older than you or I, he has been a long time in the church, and he is almost sure to resent our interference. He has already shown some tendency that way, though I have been as careful as I knew how to prevent any such feeling. However, if he is really guilty of disobeying the law of the church, we must find out and deal with him without delay, no matter how hard it may be for us."

Now thoroughly on his guard, Robert was not long in discovering positive evidence in accordance with Billy's suspicion, and was deeply worried over the effect on the reputation of the church the man's example might produce in the vicinity. The work of building up amid prejudice on every hand had all along been a struggle, and Robert was well aware that one individual so inclined can tear down faster, apparently, than a dozen can build up. He and Billy talked the matter over seriously a number of times, and at last determined to interview him.

Accordingly one evening the two young men set out together on their unpleasant mission to the

Midsby home. Reluctant as they felt, and disagreeable as the task was to both, they hesitated not a moment, but upon arriving at the house asked for a private interview, and being granted it, approached the subject in a frank and straightforward manner. Angrily at first, the man loudly attempted to deny the charges made, but when the evidence was produced he subsided after a little, begged volubly for mercy, and promised repeatedly to do better if only his name be not permitted to go before higher officials of the church.

With these promises the two allowed the case to rest for a time, but while the man outwardly conformed to their demands, anger and resentment burned fiercely in his heart and he cast about for a way of revenge which would in nowise incriminate himself or give open cause for blame to be attached. Nor was he long in finding an easy way, as he thought, to gain the desired end. With watchful, wary eyes he made a discovery, which even a less observing man might have done before.

Underneath the strong friendship that bound Robert and Billy together, he caught a glimpse of the existing rivalry. Nothing could be more propitious for his scheme. Working upon that, he would destroy their friendship and confidence in each other, and thus separating, disqualify either for harmonious, effective work. Since because of his position Robert had been required to take the initiative steps against his conduct, he desired to make his first and keenest thrust at him.



"Nothing would so surely estrange them," he argued to himself, "as a little jealousy over a girl," and without any delay set himself to work out his plans.

"Mighty fine girl that Miss Warren," he remarked casually to Billy one morning, as he shuffled into the bank just as Janey, having drawn her month's wages and deposited a portion, was leaving. "Wonder one of you smart chaps don't carry her off."

"Perhaps so, if she didn't have something to say about it," responded Billy, carelessly.

"Well, I allow she will some of these times, and then you'll be proud as Punch. Reckon you may persuade her by the time school's out, eh?" he queried with a slight leer as he leaned heavily against the ledge of the assistant cashier's window.

"Possibly." Billy made the reply somewhat absently. He was accustomed to this kind of banter and was at that moment engaged in casting up a long column of figures and paid slight attention to what the man was saying.

"From the rumors flying about it looks like it might not be very far distant," remarked the cashier, Mr. Brooks, looking up at that moment.

"Eh, that so?" Mr. Midsby caught the suggestion eagerly. It was agreeable to his purpose, and he gave another sidewise glance at the assistant, working over his accounts. "Well, that'll be about June time I reckon, and June's a fine time for weddin's, ain't it, Billy?" with a familiar, patronizing air.

"Sure, the best in the world," the young man re-

plied, closing the book with a snap and coming forward to the window to wait upon him.

"That's right, I knew you'd think so," said the man, laughing loudly, and added as he placed a five-dollar bill in his pocketbook, "Suppose you'll let us know in time to get ready?"

"Oh, of course," the other answered, with slight sarcasm in his voice, as he waited for Mr. Midsby to get out of the way of another customer. "I'll attend to the invitations in plenty of time. Don't worry."

These off-hand statements and the cashier's remark were quite sufficient for the unscrupulous man's purpose. He now had hold of something with which to work. He judged rightly when he thought Robert would not broach the subject to Billy, and further, if he let out the information as coming from Billy himself he would leave no room for doubt in Robert's mind as to its verity. The seeds of jealousy and misunderstanding once sown, he would then work insidiously to keep them alive, and in time break asunder entirely their friendship, thus weakening their spiritual progress and placing himself in a more favorable light with the others. His plan working favorably thus far, he decided to make no delay in carrying it forward. With this intent he found an excuse to call on one of the farmers not far from town on the road which led to Farmer Grayson's, making it convenient to return in the evening when Robert would be coming home from school. As he

climbed into the little roadster at Robert's invitation he was unusually talkative.

"How's things coming along? School doing purty well?" he inquired sociably, as the little bay trotted along at a good pace. It was already growing dusk and the air of the February evening was sharply cold.

"Very good, indeed," replied Robert, who was gratified to find him in so friendly and congenial a mood. He felt it augured well for the man who could receive a reproof and show a kindly spirit so soon. "I like teaching even better than I thought I would at first, and as for the school I have, don't believe there's a better one in the State."

"Fine! fine! Nothing like having work that's pleasant. Reckon you'll be laying up a right lively little sum in store for the future?" he ventured, affably.

"Not much this year. Lots of expenses here and there, and a few debts to begin with for last year's schooling, and as you know, I bought the bay and the roadster this fall. I won't much more than get everything paid up by spring and the future will have to take care of itself."

"Ought to be lookin' around and makin' choice among these purty girls," the man remarked, blandly. "Lots o' nice girls we have here. Now there's Billy Gibson; he's right sensible to make a pick o' one of the finest, and I reckon, if rumor's true, he and Miss Warren'll be stepping off together before long."

"That so?" Robert inquired, lightly.

In the dusk Midsby gave him a keen glance out of the corner of his eye and went on:

"Yes, so they say, and he inferred quite as much to me to-day himself. I gather from what he said that it will likely be in June, though he didn't say just what date."

"I see," replied Robert, briefly. "Then it is settled for sure," was his inward comment. "In reason I of course knew it must be."

Midsby's garrulous tongue rambled off to the weather and other topics, until the short half mile was covered and Robert let him out at his own door.

"Guess that job's mighty well begun," the man remarked to himself with inward satisfaction, as he watched him drive away. "If you run up agin old Midsby a few times, young feller, maybe you'll learn enough sense to let him go his own way and not try your highfalutin' airs over him."



## CHAPTER 23

## PUSSY WILLOWS

**I**T was a warm Saturday morning in March; one of those rare, quiet, sunny days which our blustery month gives us occasionally as a pleasant surprise, a forerunner of spring, and more, a foretaste of her warmth and brightness. Stormy, disagreeable days are yet to follow, but one is assured it will not be long before King Winter yields his scepter to a kinder hand, a hand which rules by love, and gently wins to life the tender leaf and blossom which the power of might and force has withered and swept to earth.

It was early for plowing, though winter snows had long been melted and the mild winds had taken the frost from the ground, but Robert knew the days would be few in which he would have time to prepare the soil for the spring gardening. He had asked for and been granted by the school board the promise of a two-week vacation in April, that he might attend the General Conference of the church, hence there would be only two or three Saturdays remaining before he would leave.

Thus, with plans for a big day's work he had arisen early and had made rapid progress clearing, cleaning, and burning the trash from the garden plot and yard. The morning was but half advanced when he finished these preliminaries, and he was just ready to

hitch the little bay horse to the plow, congratulating himself upon the speed with which his work had been dispatched, when his mother came to the kitchen door and called:

"A telephone message, Robert, from Mr. Carson. One of the children is ill and he wants you to come right away and administer, I think. The line is out of order and I couldn't get the message very well. Perhaps you'd better come and talk to him yourself."

"All right, mother; I'll be there in a moment," he replied, dropping the trace he was just fastening to the whiffletree and hastening to tie the horse to the nearest fence post.

The Carsons were a family of Saints that had moved out of Banforth at the opening of the month to a farm some three or four miles beyond Farmer Grayson's. Robert succeeded in getting the message more fully. One of the children had taken suddenly ill. They desired him to come at once. Would he also stop and see if Miss Warren could come with him? The child had been a pupil in her room all winter and was begging to see her. Robert promised to drive out at once, also to stop at the cottage and find out if Miss Warren could go.

As he hastened back to the garden, he gave but one regretful glance at his unfinished task before untying the impatient little bay and leading him away to harness and hitch to the buggy. This done, he returned to the house to make himself ready. His heart gave a glad bound as he remembered the promise which gave him an excuse for stopping at

the brown cottage and possibly the opportunity of taking Janey with him. Robert had seen her but little during the last month; for since Mr. Midsby had told of her engagement to Billy he had not called often, and it had chanced when he had done so, she was either away or had been very busy.

Notwithstanding his first glad thought over the prospect, as he sprang into the buggy and drove out the gate he considered somewhat soberly the probability of its being the last ride they would ever have together, and grimly resolved to make of it an opportunity to express his good wishes for her happiness, and renounce forever any hopes of his own that in the past had found place in his heart.

He found all three of the girls in the kitchen; Lu just lifting a brown, puffy loaf cake from the oven, Madeline washing up the baking dishes and utensils, and Janey at the ironing board near the window, smoothing out the garments of the weekly wash and placing them, neatly folded, on the rack. The fragrance of the fresh, clean clothes, and the spicy odor of the cake came to him pleasantly as he entered and was greeted with a genuine outburst of welcome from Lu and Madeline and a more conservative one from the older sister.

Janey was at first loath to leave her unfinished task, to say nothing of other duties which fell to her share on a very busy Saturday, but the plea of her pupil lost none of its effectiveness in being presented by the young man; and, putting away board and iron, she went to her room to don a fresh waist and trim

little jacket and skirt, and was down in a few moments ready for their long ride.

"I do declare to goodness, what dunces some young folks are!" Lu remarked with dry candor to Madeline as the two stood at the window watching them drive away. "If they'd just leave things to me I'd fix 'em up in short order. What's the use of fooling around in this fickle way like they've done for the last year. I don't see any sense in it myself. Love's sure blind—blind as a bat. But it's not fair to Billy."

"But maybe she likes Billy best," suggested Madeline.

"Maybe, maybe not," was Lu's laconic answer; "but if Robert had half as much sense as Billy he'd have had her long ago."

"Then why doesn't Billy get her?" Madeline asked innocently.

"Why, yes; why doesn't he?" Lu answered with noncommittal tartness which mystified the little sister and set her to pondering over the situation as they went back to their work in the kitchen.

Meanwhile Robert and Janey were speeding away over the hills behind the little bay horse. The roads were hard and well beaten. The sun continued to grow warmer as the day advanced. The venturesome robins had already returned from the south, and from leafless branches by the roadside were gayly caroling their assurance of springtime. With every mile traversed Robert felt greater reluctance to turn the conversation into the channel that, in his determination to be unselfish in his love to her and



loyalty to Billy, he had at the outstart so bravely resolved to do.

So the miles went by as they continued to talk of things of little or no consequence. In fact, I doubt whether it would ever have been mentioned at all if chance or the pussy willows hadn't led up to it, and, of the two, I'm inclined to think the pussy willows are the most responsible. Anyhow, just as they were crossing a narrow creek in a pretty valley, Janey spied a clump of willows on the bank, their long brown switches supporting hundreds of the tiny, furry, gray buds.

"Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed in delighted surprise; "see the pussy willows! Just look there! The pussies are already out in their little gray coats. Spring's here. Oh, I do want some of them."

Robert was out of the buggy before she had finished and was getting his knife ready to cut some of the long twigs.

"The most inconsistent of all things," he declared, as he reached the first long branch to her eager hands. "These pussies keep their fur coats folded nicely away through the cold months and never put them on till spring, instead of wearing them in the winter as sensible people should."

"There'll be plenty of cold days yet in which to wear them, I imagine," answered the girl, putting the little soft buds against her cheek.

"Yes, they're apt to get their toes frozen before the spring days come to stay," he replied, slashing

here and there among the branches. "How many shall I get?"

"Oh, that's an abundance," as he tossed a lot of the long branches into the buggy at her feet. "If you get any more we shall not know where to put them."

"We'll take some to the sick girl; she'll enjoy them; and save some for the girls, and Mamie will never forgive me if I don't take some home for her," Robert replied, bringing still more and tossing them in on top of the others. "She was asking me this morning if I had seen any yet. Besides," he added, soberly, putting his knife back in his pocket and stepping into the buggy, "this may be the last spring I shall have the opportunity to gather pussy willows for some time."

"The last spring?" she queried, lifting her eyes in surprise. "Why so?"

"Oh, just a notion of mine, I suppose," he responded, after a moment. "Somehow I've had a feeling of late that I won't be in this part of the country next year or for several springs. That may be, however, on account of a decision I have just made. I believe I have not told you that I intend to yield to the request of our missionary in charge and allow my name to go before the church authorities at the spring conference for an appointment if they choose to make one."

"No, you had not told me." There was a little pause during which Janey studied one of the little pinkish gray pussies with absorbed interest. "And you have some idea where they may send you?"

"None whatever; in fact, I do not know that they will send me anywhere. As far as that is concerned, the place matters little to me," he added indifferently. "China or Siberia will do as well as any. I really do not have much choice, but I am not averse to any appointment now that I have made up my mind."

"Evidently you are not considering your little flock at home." She was looking up at him thoughtfully.

"On the contrary," he replied, "they are constantly in my thoughts and I would regret going even more than I do if I thought they would not be placed in better hands than mine. There are others so much more experienced than I that they will undoubtedly fare better. However, the Saints here have all grown undeniably dear to me the past winter, and I shall not leave without a feeling of great loss upon my part."

She was silent and he went on after a short pause: "Elder Venton wrote me not long since that he thinks Billy should be ordained a priest this spring. He will be a great help to whoever comes, as he has been to me, or he may be placed in charge himself. I shall not worry if the work rests in his care and in the care of the wise little counselor he has chosen to assist him," with a sidewise glance at her. "I am informed that the event is soon to take place, and may I assure you, Janey," he finished hurriedly, "that I wish for you both the happiest of futures."

Janey turned to him a face flushing with be-

wildered astonishment, and the pussy willow twig she held dropped upon the others at her feet.

"Who gave you such information as that? It's certainly news to me. I know nothing about it."

It was Robert's turn to look surprised.

"Why, I was told several weeks ago that you and Billy were to be married this summer, and I thought—from the way the information came—it must be true."

"Did Billy tell you that?" she queried pointedly.

"No—" he hesitated, "but one who had heard it directly from him—I thought—I beg your pardon—it must all be a mistake," he ended in confusion.

"Well, it surely is a mistake. There never has been any—any such understanding, and what's more," she added a little angrily, as a sudden suspicion of a scheme on Billy's part flashed through her mind, "*there never will be.*"

She would have retracted the statement in a moment if she could have done so, but it was too late.

"Never will be!" Robert repeated. "Why Janey, do you mean really that you do not care for him? Please don't be angry with me for asking, but—but I thought you—"

"I am certainly angry with him if he has circulated any report that we are to be married," Janey replied, quickly, scarcely noting whither the conversation was tending. "I shall see him about it at once."

"Please don't. It must be all a mistake. If it isn't





“‘I’ll venture Billy never told it that way at all,’ Janey evaded irrelevantly, in a desperate attempt to turn the tide of the conversation.”

true, I am sure Billy could never have said it. I heard it through Mr. Midsby, who said that Billy had told him."

"Oh!" The exclamation had an emphasis that Robert was unable to interpret, but in his sudden joy of finding the report untrue, a great hope sprang again to his heart and all the firm resolves he had made at the outstart were swept away.

"Janey," he said quickly, "it's useless for me to keep silent any longer. You surely must know of my regard for you, but Billy has been my friend and brother in a thousand ways. I knew he loved you, and I thought you loved him. He had so much with which to make you happy, I so little, that I couldn't be so selfish as to place my interest first. I've made a dreadful blunder over this matter in some way."

"I'll venture Billy never told it that way at all," Janey evaded irrelevantly, in a desperate attempt to turn the tide of the conversation. "It's just another effort of Mr. Midsby's to stir up trouble for all of us."

"I am aware," Robert continued persistently, "that I have nothing in the world to offer you, Janey—no home, nor even the prospects of one very soon, and I have vowed more than once that if I ever became a missionary I'd never ask a girl to be my wife and share the hardships of such a life."

"Solemn vows should not be broken," Janey parried, mischief lurking under the long eyelashes. "Why trouble yourself about them, since you've de-

cided for both and left nothing for her to say in the matter?"

"That's past," he answered quickly, "and I'm bringing the question now for her to decide. Please will you tell me?"

Her answer came after a little pause, but so low was it whispered that no one could have heard it but Robert, unless it was the neglected little pussy willows, and I'm sure they keep a secret well, far better than Robert could, at least, whose face as they rode slowly along over the hills reflected the joy of his heart. To him the dull old world seemed suddenly to have transformed itself into paradise.

## CHAPTER 24

## A DAY OF COMPENSATION

**I**NTERMINABLY long as the time may have seemed to an anxious, waiting family, the ride had seemed short enough to the two when they came in sight of the Carson farmhouse and Robert turned the horse in at the wide gate which one of the children had hurried down to open for them.

The sick child, which had so frightened the family that morning by suddenly going into convulsions, was some better when they arrived, and under the quieting ministrations now fell into a restful sleep. The family, growing calmer as their fears were allayed, began preparations for dinner and insisted that their guests remain until it was served. Robert with a thought of the plowing to be done, and Janey of household tasks awaiting her return, yielded at last, though reluctantly, to their persuasions.

Scarcely had they finished partaking of this bounteous country repast which their grateful hostess prepared, when Robert was called again to the telephone. This time it was Farmer Grayson's voice.

"Hello! Robert, that you? Called in town and your mother said you were out at Carson's—How's the child?—That's good. Glad to hear it. Say, by the way, have you got time to come around this way on your way home? 'Twon't be more'n a mile or two





"Twice, three times, he read the telegram in wonder and uncertainty, then hurried to get the Bible out of his valise."

(See page 268.)



farther for you, I guess, an' there's some one here would like to see you."

"Why, if it's really necessary I'll go that way," Robert replied; "but if the matter can wait, I'd rather come another time. I have work at home that I'd like to get done this afternoon, for you know I've a lot to do for mother before I leave in April."

"Well, the folks out here are pretty anxious, and I 'low you won't worry about leaving things go at home when you find out what's up. Jest take my word for it this once and come on, an' if you ain't satisfied afterward, I'll drive in town some of these fine mornings and do a day's gardening for you."

Robert agreed to come. Besides, he was not particularly averse to lengthening out the ride home a number of miles, for somehow the garden work didn't appear half so essential to him as it had done earlier in the day.

As they drove up near the homestead, Farmer Grayson was in the barn lot, and Robert recognized with him Mr. Bowers and Mr. Orson, two of his school patrons.

"That's right. Knew ye'd come," said the good farmer, coming out to greet them. "Glad to see yè, too, Miss Janey, and the wimmin folk'll sure be pleased. Mrs. Bowers and Mrs. Orson's here, too."

"It is this way," continued the farmer, putting one foot on the hub of the wheel and leaning towards them; "the folks come over this mornin' to help me move some of the sheds around the barn lot, and we've been doin' a leetle work, but a mighty lot of

talkin'. This ain't the first time, either. And mother—she's been talking to the wimmin folks all winter and givin' 'em tracts and papers on the gospel message. To-day noon Mr. Bowers here says he's ready for the water and so's his wife and Mrs. Orson. Mr. Orson ain't quite ready yet, but he hasn't any mind to hinder his wife from bein' baptized, and she declares she won't wait for him another day. So I just phoned to see if you couldn't come out as well as not."

"You see," he added in conclusion, with a jovial chuckle, "some of them good sermons you preached this winter down here in the schoolhouse wasn't for nothin' after all, and the seed fell on good ground and is springin' up in the hearts of these honest neighbors of mine."

"Guess I can't claim the credit for all the planting, though," said Robert, with a happy light in his eye, as he helped Janey out of the buggy and shook hands with the three men. "Seems to me you've done the biggest part of the sowing, Farmer Grayson, and I'm just here to share in the harvest."

"Well, don't matter 'bout that nohow. I count myself a fairly good farmer when it comes to lands and soils, but you couldn't have made me believe a few years ago that I'd ever have a hand in harvestin' souls."

Robert went to the house, and in a short time had dressed himself in the suit Farmer Grayson had provided; and the rest having made themselves ready, the little company went across the fields to the little



stream that ran across one corner of the farm. Farmer Grayson having notified some of the neighbors, a number had already gathered.

It was only the second experience Robert had had in performing the rite of baptism. During the winter he had several times been permitted to preach in the little schoolhouse where he taught, and as he stood at the edge of the water now, while the baptismal hymn was being sung his heart was filled with gratitude to God that he could have a part in his great work. But he was not prepared for that which was to follow. When the three adults had been immersed in the clear waters of the little running stream, without a thought of there being any others, Robert was just stepping upon the bank when Cecile Orson, the prim little, black-eyed, twelve-year-old daughter of the Orsons, stepped forward and indicated her intention of being baptized. In wonderment he led her in and performed the sacred rite, and when one after the other the children of the two families, all of them his pupils, followed in quick succession, expressing their willingness to take upon them the name of their Master, Robert felt that his cup of joy was full. What did the sacrifices of the past amount to now? Had not God already repaid him a hundredfold for the efforts he had made to set a worthy example and to help bring these precious souls into his kingdom?

"I 'lowed you wouldn't mind leaving the garden work a leetle longer," declared Farmer Grayson, rubbing his hands together in great satisfaction as

they went back across the fields. "Much as I take to farmin', it seems to me this is a heap sight better 'n gardening or common, everyday harvesting."

The confirmations were attended to at the house of the good farmer soon after, and the afternoon was nearly gone when at last the little bay pony started on its return journey. By the time they reached home the day was done and the dusk of night was settling over a quiet world.

"A day of compensation," Robert whispered to Janey as he bade her good-night at the cottage door. "Already my blessings and rewards are far more than I shall be able to merit even in a lifetime of service."

## CHAPTER 25

### "WHITHER THOU GOEST"

**A** SABBATH peace pervaded the atmosphere of the little brown cottage. A prolonged April shower, which had begun before noon and still continued, kept the young people all at home. Just now each one was occupying himself according to his own individual tastes. Janey sat on a low stool near her mother's rocker, reading aloud to her from her favorite author; Lu, at the other side of the room, was drumming softly on the old piano; Madeline was at the center table, absorbed in arranging her numerous paper dolls into classes for their weekly Sunday school exercises; and Ned, stretched lazily on the couch, amused himself by teasing the cat.

This little homey scene, which lasted for half or three quarters of an hour, was abruptly upset by the sudden knock at the front door and the appearance of a messenger boy.

"Special delivery letter, Miss Warren," he said politely to Janey, who had answered the knock. "Will you please sign here?"

"Well, I vow, Janey," exclaimed Ned, as the messenger boy turned away and he got up to peer at the postmark over her shoulder. "Things are getting to a pretty pass when a letter every day in the week won't suffice, and a special delivery comes on Sunday."

"Who sent it?" asked Madeline, dropping the superintendent of her school on the floor and coming to look also.

"Oh, just another letter from Robert—not out of the ordinary at all of late, little sister, only that it's a special delivery," explained Ned. "He'd better not undertake a mission yet, or it will take all his money to pay for stamps and stationery."

Janey moved away from him to the window. For some unaccountable reason her hand shook a trifle as she tore open the envelope. By the time she had glanced rapidly over the hastily written sheets not a vestige of color remained in her cheeks. In the midst of a teasing remark Ned caught the look on her face and suddenly stopped.

"Nothing—nothing serious happened, has there, sis?" he asked in some alarm.

"No—oh, no—not particularly," Janey found voice to answer, then fled to the refuge of her own little room upstairs.

"Something is the matter, though," said Lu. "What could Robert have written to make her look like that?"

"You don't suppose anything serious has happened to him, do you?" Mrs. Warren asked, anxiously.

"Why, of course not," replied Lu; "he wouldn't have written the letter himself if it had. Perhaps something has happened to his father. He's at conference with him, and maybe Robert's written it to Janey for her to tell Mrs. Clayton and Mamie."



"Oh, dear!" cried Madeline, "I hope not. Robert's father is the dearest, kindest man in the world."

"If it had been anything of that kind she'd have stopped and told us," Ned reasoned.

"Maybe it's about his appointment," said Lu, thoughtfully. "Maybe Robert is going a long way off; but she needn't have turned so white about it. What else could she expect?"

"It's a sure thing something unusual has happened," Ned declared.

"Well, I do wish she'd come downstairs again and let us know what it is, anyhow," said Lu, impatiently, "and relieve us from this suspense."

In her own room Janey read the letter over again, and yet again more slowly; then, going to the little east window, she knelt down, and pushing up the white sash, rested her arms and head upon the sill. The cool, moist breeze came in softly, fanning her cheek, and lifting lightly the soft waves of brown hair about her forehead. On creeping vine outside the buds were swelling, and beyond it the little plum tree was already showing white blossoms. A faint sweet fragrance from it reached her now, making her realize that only a few more days and the little home would be surrounded with leaf and blossom.

"And is this the service required of us, O Lord?" she whispered, clasping her hands together and leaning out so that the moisture fell on her face. "To leave all and follow thee? It seemed an easy thing to us when we read of your asking it of the fishermen by the sea. We wondered that they ever

loitered with their nets or sighed to return to their boats on the blue waters. We wondered, too, that when thy Son asked of the rich young man to give up his possessions and follow him, that he turned away sorrowfully. Lord, our little earthly treasures—why should they become so dear to us? We are far, oh, so far yet from keeping thy first great commandment.”

All at once the mists of the afternoon and the surrounding scenes of the home life seemed to fade away, as on the swift wings of memory Janey suddenly felt herself transported to a very different one—to the little cabin schoolhouse on the Dakota prairie, where death-dealing winter winds had shut them in and she had fought and prayed and worked for the lives of her pupils. Could it be that it was but little more than two years ago, and—what was it she had promised if He would help her to save them and restore her little sister? She remembered it well—the prayer she had prayed for their safety. And the promise, if that prayer were granted, she remembered it, too, “My life shall be spent in thy service wheresoever and in whatsoever way thou wilt.”

A half hour passed slowly by. Downstairs in the little parlor the family moved restlessly about. The waiting was growing unbearable, and a foreboding shadow had fallen over them. Would she never come down? The April rain ceased at last and the sun shone out brightly. For some relief from the tension Ned finally strolled outside and stood idly watching

the little rivulets of water flow down the garden paths. Lu ceased her nervous thumping on the piano and followed him, and Madeline, for want of something better to do, went to the kitchen and mixed the cornmeal and chopped grain for the chickens' evening feed.

Mrs. Warren, sitting alone by the window, laid aside the paper she had been trying to read, and looked absently out of the window until a light step sounded behind her, and the sheets of a letter fluttered into her lap. This was quickly followed by a pair of soft arms suddenly clasping about her neck over the back of her chair, and a rose-tinted cheek pressing itself close to her own.

"Mother, dear, may I talk to you a little while?"

"Why, Janey, of course you may. I have been waiting. What is it?"

"Listen, mother, for just a little while, and then you may read this letter." The girl sat down on the arm of her mother's chair and put one arm about her shoulders.

"What I have to tell you," she said, after a moment, as she straightened the lace about her mother's throat, "will not be easy for you—nor for any of us, but—as you know, I am Robert's promised wife."

"Yes, little daughter, I know——"

"And a letter from him to-day tells me he has been called and will soon be ordained to the office of seventy."

“Truly? He is very young.”

“Yes—and you know that to be a seventy means to stand as a minute man—one who may go anywhere—near or far, even—beyond the seas.”

“Janey, he isn’t going to take——”

“Listen, please, just a little longer, mother dear,” she went on hurriedly, but gently. “Long ago I promised my heavenly Father to serve him—to go wherever he asked me to go, and to serve as he chose. Yesterday those who make the appointments called Robert and asked him if he were willing to take a foreign mission—to the islands of the sea—a very long way from home—and they think it better for me to go with him. He writes to know if I am willing to go. They are awaiting my answer, which should be sent by wire this evening.”

“To be gone how long?”

“Five years.”

“And your answer—will it be——”

“As I trust you will allow me, mother dear. I am young and strong. Robert needs me; I must not hinder him in his service, and the call has come for us to go——”

But Mrs. Warren had grown suddenly white and limp, and Janey’s startled cry brought Madeline from the kitchen and Lu and Ned hurrying from the garden.

A few moments later, as the four worked excitedly around the couch where they had placed her, her eyes opened and she smiled up at them wanly. In answer to Ned’s look of inquiry then, Janey silently



handed him the letter. That letter was like the sounding of a funeral knell in the little cottage where they had all dwelt so long and so happily together, bringing as it did the thought of a separation from that sister upon whose strength and courage the family had so often relied. Janey sat with a very white face by the low couch, softly stroking her mother's hair, her other arm enfolding the sobbing Madeline, who refused to be comforted. Lu, silent, dry-eyed, tearless, moved in and out, bringing water and bathing her mother's hands and face, or preparing something for her to drink, while Ned stood helplessly, looking on.

So the remaining hours of the Sabbath Day went by in the cottage. Meanwhile, in a little city many miles distant, a young man restlessly paced the streets alone, and waited for his answer. At a late hour it had not come, and he went to his room and to bed. There followed an almost sleepless night, and with the first break of day he was up and out for a long walk into the country.

It was nearly noon when at last the messenger boy appeared with the familiar yellow envelope. Robert took it with fingers not quite steady. By the grate, in the guest chamber where he and his father roomed together, he tore it open hastily. The message was not contained in a single word, as he had anticipated. Instead, with surprise, he read the following: "Ruth 1:16—latter portion."

In his analysis of Bible principles and doctrines, Robert's research and study had not familiarized him

with this particular book, and in his present disturbed state of mind he could not recall a single statement nor a connected thought as to what it contained. Twice, three times he read the telegram in wonder and uncertainty, then hurried to get the Bible out of his valise. Opening it with undue haste he at last found the place and read there this answer in the words of the loyal Moabite maiden to Naomi: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

## CHAPTER 26

## AN UNLUCKY HORSESHOE

**L**U WARREN dropped down on the back doorstep in the welcome shade of the big box elder and fanned her flushed, perspiring face with the old sun hat in such a manner as to threaten its further usefulness as a head covering. As she did so the packages she had been carrying slipped from her tired arms to the step below, or rolled to the ground at her feet.

"Dear me, Lu," exclaimed Madeline, coming around the corner of the kitchen at that moment from the chicken yard, whither she had just been to water the thirsty fowls, "couldn't you find a more convenient place to put yourself than right in the doorway? How do you expect a body to get in and out of the kitchen?"

"Just step over things," replied her sister, moving slightly. "It's easy, but the walk down town in the hot sun wasn't. I was so tired and warm that when I got under the shade of this old tree and the cool breeze struck me I felt like I couldn't go another step, and simply flopped."

"You do look clear fagged out," said the little sister, all sympathy in a moment and pausing to set down the empty pail. "Ned was going down town this afternoon, and you should have left the errands for him to do."

"No, the station agent telephoned this morning that an express package was there. Mother has been wanting for two days the lining and buttons for Janey's suit, which I knew were in that package, and she's been worrying because they weren't here, so I ran down to the station right away, to get them."

"Too bad to have such a walk in this hot sun," said Madeline, sitting down on the step beside her and affectionately patting her shoulder. "But you look like you'd hurried so. What made you do that? Mother wasn't in such a rush, was she?"

"Yes, I forgot. I did run all the way back. It's so dreadful."

"Dreadful, I should say; why, it's enough to give you a sunstroke."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lu, "I didn't mean the running. I'm always doing such absurd things. Why couldn't I be nice and proper like Janey always is, I wonder."

"Why, what's the matter now?" Madeline queried anxiously. "You always do things right, Lu."

"Yes, I surely do them right—especially when it comes to making blunders, I can do them up in fine style. I'm a master hand at that I tell you. Where's Janey?"

"Down in the garden, getting the vegetables for dinner."

"Humph! she'd better have gone to the station in my place—no, I'm glad she didn't. I saw Billy there."

"Billy?" queried Madeline, "and what about him?"



"Matter enough," replied Lu in tragic tones. "Billy's heart is completely broken!"

"Broken!" exclaimed the little sister, solemnly. "Why, Lu, what's happened?"

"It's what's going to happen that's done it," Lu answered almost curtly. "It's just naturally going to kill him for Janey to get married—and her wedding day less than a week off now, too. I didn't know he was going to leave town till I got down to the depot, and there stood the ten-thirty train, and who should be standing on the steps of the last coach but Billy Gibson, suit case and all. Oh, I tell you he looked desperate."

"You can't mean it," said Madeline, searching her sister's face with troubled eyes.

"But I do mean it," Lu answered still more tragically. "I know it. Why, Madeline, you know yourself that no one could love our Janey and not be broken-hearted if somebody else got her. Just think how we feel about her going away, and then think what it *must* be for Billy. I tell you it's true."

Madeline's blue eyes directed their gaze to the twittering wrens in the box by the cherry tree, then afar off to the green-robed hills in the distance, and back again to her sister's distressed countenance, while she sought for a comforting word with which to soothe her perturbed spirit. "I guess if it's broken somebody'll have to mend it," she said at last, stroking her sister's sleeve. "If we had the pieces here we'd mend 'em together like we do the

dishes, wouldn't we?" she added, with pretty seriousness. "You're a splendid hand at that."

"Humph! an easy task if it were a dish. You can't mend hearts with glue," Lu retorted with a short laugh. "How silly you are, Madeline."

"No, I'm not silly," replied Madeline; "you always could do anything, Lu."

"Nonsense."

"What's all this about?" asked Ned, opening the screen door behind them and pushing himself out. "Broken hearts and dishes came floating in to my ears."

"Oh, Lu says Billy's heart is broken, and she's worrying about it," Madeline informed him briefly, as she moved over to the end of the step so he could get past them.

"Lu always takes the part of the under dog," laughed Ned. "Don't take it so seriously, sis. On my word, he'll get over it soon enough. Just see to it that you don't break hearts yourself some of these days when you get a little older."

"I've done worse this very day," sighed Lu, despairingly, "I've broken a car window."

"A car window!" from both Ned and Madeline as they stared at her.

Lu nodded miserably. "Just my usual luck," she vouchsafed presently. "Of course I always do the ridiculous thing, but Billy did look so desperate I had to do something and do it quick, for the train was beginning to move. I've always heard a horseshoe was a sign of good luck, and just as the train started

I saw one lying near me on the platform, and I picked it up and threw it at him. And what do you suppose the crazy thing did? Instead of landing on the platform beside him it went smack through the car window ten feet away and nearly scared an old lady to death who was sitting in the next seat."

"Why, Lu Warren, what will you be doing next?"

"I don't know," sighed the girl, mournfully, wiping her hot face with a small wet handkerchief.

"And Billy, what did he do?" asked Ned, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"Billy—oh," exclaimed Lu, "I guess I must have looked dreadfully funny and scared, for he looked first at me, then at the shattered glass, and then he called out: 'Lu, who were you trying to kill?' I managed to gasp out that I was throwing a horseshoe after him for good luck, and you should have seen him and that conductor laugh. I couldn't see anything funny about it. Then Billy dashed inside the car, and in a minute he stuck his head out through that broken window and shouted, 'It's all right, Lu. I've found it, and I'll take it and the luck that comes with it. Never mind about the window.' And the last I saw of him he was waving the horseshoe out the window and laughing like a crazy fellow. Now could anything be more absurd? A nice little bill for a man in trouble to pay. He'll think it's anything but good luck." And Lu began fanning again with renewed activity.

Ned was by this time rolling on the grass, holding his sides, and the little sister in her most matronly

way was vainly trying to repress unsympathetic smiles.

"Lu, you never do anything by halves," the brother managed to articulate at last.

"No, I broke the whole window."

"Lucky enough for Billy you didn't make a straight throw."

"Never mind; maybe the jollying up was worth the price of the window to him," said Madeline, consolingly, while she frowned at Ned's laughter. "Anyhow, I guess his heart isn't quite broken or he wouldn't laugh like that. But, Lu, you're ruining your hat. See, you're tearing the brim," she chided.

"Why, so I am," said Lu, looking at it ruefully. "And it's well for you to be having a watchful eye for your future property, Madeline. Since Janey has worn it only two seasons, and myself as many, it should descend to you in a more respectable condition."

"Thanks. I'll never wear that hat, so you may finish it," declared Madeline stoutly. "It's older and more dilapidated than the last heirloom I wore."

"The more antique, the more valuable some things are accounted in this world; why not so with hats?" mused Lu, holding the rejected article out in front of her and regarding it critically. "Now, if this were a piece of furniture, no telling how much it would be worth in a few more years."


"Janey says I am to have an entirely new hat for the wedding."



"Which is very extravagant, considering the fact that she is so soon to be a minister's wife," replied Lu with mock severity.

"There she comes now from the garden with the vegetables," said Madeline.

"And I hear mother calling me," said Lu, rising quickly. "Will you start the kitchen fire, Madeline? And please, Ned, don't tell Janey about the broken window and Billy. She'd feel terrible. Hereafter I shall steadfastly affirm that a horseshoe is unlucky."



## CHAPTER 27

## THE STRAIGHT FURROW

THE following day the powerful giant engine of the Oriental Limited, drawing behind it a long line of passenger coaches, was steaming its way past green wheat fields, many hundred acres in extent, and over wide stretches of Dakota prairie. Above the green earth a sunny sky stretched its blue canopy, and soft south winds set the young, tender grain and prairie grasses into motion, like the rippling of many waters.

On the platform of the observation car a young man leaned carelessly against the brass railing and moodily looked out upon the June landscape. His handsome features wore a look of dogged indifference as he noted the prosperous fields of growing grain, which gave promise of their thousands to fortunate farmers and already wealthy land owners. He sensed but slightly the charm of a scene which at one time had held him enthralled. Scarce two years had passed since he had so suddenly made his decision to leave the free life of this broad and open country for college work, and then to follow it with a creditable position in the growing little town in its picturesque setting of hills and trees and blossoms. A year ago it had seemed etherealized to him; now he almost hated it, since it marked for him his first

defeat. Yes, strange but true, William Maxwell Gibson, who in his young life had already twice faced the hard tasks of pioneer life with a light heart and a boyish whistle ever on his lips, who had conquered the forests and the prairies, was at last compelled to learn one of life's most valuable lessons—the lesson which comes with defeat.

When but a very small boy his father and mother had moved into the great forests of one of the Central States, and almost with baby hands he had learned to cut the saplings and trim them for fire wood. Later, as his muscles grew larger and stronger and his strength increased, the mighty monarchs of the forest fell before the ringing strokes of his ax with a skill that many an older wood cutter might have envied. He had hunted and trapped through these wildernesses, and more than once had matched his strength with the wild creatures in a perilous encounter.

All this in the boyhood home of his first remembrance. Then came pioneer life again in a vastly different country, when as a youth with undaunted spirit and a heart for the labor, he set for himself the task of helping to conquer the great prairie lands of the North, to cause the sod to yield its stored-up energies for the production of useful grains, and to turn the desert places into cultivated fields. And as his father had conquered them and instructed him how, so he conquered, even through summer's drought and heat and pestilence, and through rigorous winter's cold and peril. There were times, of

course, when for a season adversity frowned upon them, but they had been temporary, and in the main prosperity had been their lot.

People had always said of young Gibson that "Things came his way." In other words, whatever he undertook prospered. The meanest, feeblest lamb, found shivering or half starving in the cold hills, responded to his ministrations and became in due time the beauty of the flock. The scrawniest pig in the pen, when intrusted to his care, became the fattest and finest porker. The soil that he cultivated yielded its richest increase, while the most fractious horse of the plains, under his masterful touch, was soon gentle and tractable. For miles around his services had been sought by ranchmen for the training of difficult and high-spirited steeds. Thus it had ever been with him at the big homestead which he and his father had added to from time to time until it numbered many hundreds of acres, and where in the simplicity of homestead life he had lived with the freedom of a young king.

It might be whispered, too, though perhaps it would not be well to tell it everywhere, that in his home Billy's cheery smile and whistle and his contagious good humor had always won for him his own way with an admiring mother, a doting sister, and the worshipful younger members of the family, to say nothing of an easy, indulgent father.

It was from this life, with the advent of a new ambition and hope, that he had so suddenly broken himself two years before and started out upon a new



quest. Knowing his own limitations in some respects, it had led him first to the college, and there, as in other things, he had kept up the same pace, equaling and more often excelling his classmates. The triumphs he had won in his studies and athletics he had accepted with a careless ease and grace which had made him a favorite of men and admired of women.

And so he had continued to pursue his quest. Having never experienced defeat, why should he expect it now, when the object was the heart of a maiden, and she to him the gentlest of all maidens? He had scarcely questioned but that he would finally succeed. The probabilities were in his favor, and he had matched his strength against his rival's, comfortably assuring himself that in the end he would win against any odds.

Yet he had failed in this most momentous experience of his life. For the first time he was looking defeat in the face; or rather, he was turning his back and endeavoring to flee from it. It was a new sensation, and the young man was taking it with ill grace. The announcement of Robert and Janey's wedding, to take place a few days hence, he had not been able to accept philosophically. His friends and the world in general were treating him badly. The occasional jest of his associates irritated him beyond measure or patience. Then, from across the wide distance came the long call of the old, free life, to forest shade or open prairie, and, arranging quickly for a vacation, he was off without a word of fare-

well to anyone. A day and a night's travel had carried him again into these familiar scenes, yet with each succeeding mile traveled he was growing more restive. Accusing the world, and his friends especially, of unkindness and disloyalty, and fate of grievously mistreating him, for a long time now he had leaned almost motionless against the railing, absorbed in his moody thoughts. The pert little prairie dogs, dodging up a moment to bark at the flying train and back again quickly to their places of refuge, half amused, half annoyed him; but he watched with something of the old satisfaction the low-flying redwing as it made its way across the coulee.

A call from the diner aroused him finally, and he followed the porter into the car and in spite of his troubles succeeded in disposing of a considerable portion of an appetizing lunch; then he repaired to his seat in the Pullman and opened his valise to look for a book. As he did so a singular object to be carried in a young man's suit case fell out. An old rusty horseshoe with a broken nail in one side and here and there places where the rust had been rubbed off, an evidence that it had been used frequently by the loafers about the depot in playing quoits. A broad smile broke over the young man's features as he picked it up.

"Good luck," he mused. "Here's hoping you'll bring it, though you did cost me the price of a window." Then he broke into an audible laugh at the remembrance of Lu's startled and dismayed face.

"Lu's a brick," he murmured. "There isn't one in a thousand like her." After which he carefully placed the horseshoe back in a corner of the suit case, comfortably disposed himself in the seat with his book, and for some reason, whether the dinner, the book, the horseshoe, or all three, his face wore a more cheerful expression for the remainder of the afternoon.

A few more hours' ride brought him to his destination. Nelse and Sally and the trim Overland awaited him at the station, and they were not long in reaching the homestead. Billy noted with a touch of regret the age lines on his mother's face and that his father was beginning to look worn, but little Pansy was emerging from spoiled babyhood to a bright-eyed lass. The two years had also made changes in the farm, and the young man was by no means averse to a new, comfortable farmhouse, supplied with modern conveniences, which had taken the place of the old cabin home.

In the center of this doting home circle, admired and petted and unduly indulged in his whims and fancies, Billy recovered for a few days his accustomed good spirits, then suddenly lapsed back again into discontent and moodiness.

"Reckon the old place don't seem jest as home-like and natural as it used to 'fore you went to workin' in the bank and runnin' round back thar in them well-settled States," remarked Mr. Gibson one afternoon, about a week after his son's arrival. The two were making a tour of inspection as to needed

repairs on barns and granaries, and a rather disgruntled expression from the younger man's lips gave rise to the above speech.

"Oh, it's all well enough, I guess, to anybody that likes it," replied Billy, not with the best of humor. "Fact is, I'm tired of it back there, and this seems altogether too quiet. I've a notion the West's the place for me. Let's sell out and go to California."

The old man gave a surprised grunt. "Well, son, ye air out of sorts with the world, ain't ye?" he said. "Reckon ye don't need to try to pull us all out of our stalls jest cause ye air a leetle restless yerself."

"Might as well be out of the world as in it so far as living there or out here's concerned," replied Billy, with marked discontent in his tones. "There's splendid opportunities in the West. I want to go where there's something doing."

Mr. Gibson gave one quick, shrewd glance at his son from the corner of his eye, squinted the other up at the weather vane on the top of the big barn, was silent for a few moments, then spoke tersely:

"It ain't no fault of places, Billy, that's ailin' of ye, and I reckon it won't do to begin kickin' and balkin' now. Ye've always had things purty much your own way, I 'low, with ma and me, but ye've got to learn it don't always happen that way in this world, an' if ye run up agin some things, it's better to buckle to and face 'em. Ye can't git around by runnin' off to a new country. If things don't go always to suit you, set yourself for a straight furrer and plow



ahead. Ye'll pull through straight enough by and by."

"It's easy enough to talk; it's another thing to understand what one's talking about," said Billy, impatiently. "A man doesn't always know what the other fellow's up against."

"Huhhuh! Mebbe so," admitted the old man, stroking his stubby beard in the manner characteristic of him when engaged in an argument. "Yes, I 'low mebbe that's true. It ain't always an easy thing to understand human natur' nohow, but I 'low whatever's at the bottom of any feller's foolishness thar's not a great sight o' difference. It's mebbe a good crop o' wheat burned up by the drought, or it might be some feller's got a balky span o' mules off on ye in a trade, or it might be a bank account gone dry, and it might be—" the old man paused a moment and leaned his arms in a resting position on the high board fence and seemed watching with absorbed attention the playful maneuvers of several young calves in the barn lot; "it might be that some gal didn't see things the same way a feller would like to hev her do."

Billy flushed, but the old man's eyes seemed oblivious to anything but the calves, and he went meditatively on:

"Now I size things up about like this: If it's the crop that's gone under, thar's still another year comin' an' it'll rain sometime; if it's the balky mules, the most of 'em ye kin break of the habit, and if ye can't ye can jist console yerself with the thought

that it's better fer ye if yer to be cheated in a bargain than to cheat; if it's the bank account, thar's none of us can make use of it after we die anyhow, an'—if it's the gal, wall, I allus 'lowed that a feller didn't need to go to the dogs jest 'cause one of 'em don't like his plans."

A short pause ensued in which Billy silently whittled the top board of the fence and ran the edge of his pocketknife dangerously near a nail.

"I've heard folks say in my time," Mr. Gibson continued, evenly, "that a man couldn't make much of himself without the influence of a good woman, an' I reckon that's all true enough; a woman's influence counts more than he's willin' to give her credit for, sometimes; but I swan if I don't think that feller's a blamed coward that after she's got him started in the straight furrer an' his face set in the right direction, he'll then let loose of the plow handles again jest 'cause she won't go all the way down to the end of the field with him and help him to keep hangin' on. The feller that ain't got any more backbone than that don't deserve her help in the first place."

Billy's knife slipped through the hard wood at that instant, against the nail, and an ugly nick was chipped out of the fine steel blade.

"Such advice may sound good to the giver," he said a little hardly, "but it isn't so easy when you have some experiences. To have the experience one's self and to tell the other fellow what he ought to do are two different things."

"Jest so, jest so," acquiesced the old man, "an' I don't know but in your case, seein' as how things is, that it ain't a leetle harder than most cases I've known. Leastways it looks that way to you now. An' of course I, bein' an' old man of a good many years, might not be able to determine jest the feelin's of a young feller of twenty-three. Now I 'mind me of a time when I wan't so old as I am now, an' thought purty much in the same line as you've been talkin' this afternoon. I mind thar came into our country about that time one of the purtiest, nicest leetle gals I'd ever laid eyes on. I 'low thar never was a gal smarter nor winsomer, an' when she married a young feller by the name of Warren and then went to live in another State, thar was several of us young fellers purty badly cut up about it."

Billy's astonished look went quickly to his father's grizzled countenance, under which no one, least of all the son, would have expected a touch of romance or sentiment. It was gravely impassive now and the son respectfully returned his gaze again to the board he was whittling.

"And that brings to mind the little school-ma'am, who came out here to our deestricht a couple o' years ago. It turned out she was their daughter. Nice leetle thing she was, too, with her mother's eyes an' hair, though she wa'n't quite so good looking in the main."

The pocketknife Billy held fell from his hand and clattered down against the boards of the fence. Impulsively he took a step nearer his father.

"That's a mighty good steer out thar, Billy," the old man remarked casually, as a fine-looking Hereford nosed its way along the fence and pulled at the grass. "I 'low he'll tip the scales to the fifteen hundred notch right now. Nelse and mother hev set him aside from the herd as an offering, an' every cent he brings, they say, is a-goin' to the church this fall. I tried to argue with 'em that he was the best of the bunch, but our Nelse says as pert as you please, 'The best and firstlings of the flock belong to the Lord. That's the way it was in olden times.' Nelse is a-gettin' to be a mighty fine lad, Billy; a mighty fine lad."

"That he is, dad," Billy affirmed with a heartiness that brought a new ring to his voice.

"Yes, yes; a mighty fine lad," the old man repeated. "He'll be nigh your equal some day, Billy, if not quite so."

"Will excel me, I hope," said Billy, extending his hand; "but, dad, I'll hang on to the plow handles, and I trust you won't ever again have occasion to fear for my backbone. I'll never be as good as my old dad, but I'll try to plow the furrow so straight he won't be ashamed of it or of me."

They shook hands gravely, the father and son, with a fuller understanding, with a greater realization of each other's worth and character, and a new confidence and respect which was never to be broken.



## CHAPTER 28

## WILD ROSES AND FORGET-ME-NOTS

SUNNY skies, soft winds, the freshness of leaf, and the fragrance of blossom betrayed unmistakably the presence of June time. Around the brown cottage an air of sweet mystery and subdued excitement had hovered for many days. Nature herself seemed to sense that an event of great importance was about to take place, and for several weeks had been busy weaving her richest robes, and lavishly bedecking them with bud and blossom. Never before had the foliage in native and orchard trees hung in such heavy luxuriance. Never had grass grown more smoothly on lawn and emerald-bordered street. Never had bush and vine and shrub seemed to vie so earnestly with each other in contributing their blossoms to decorate and make fragrant the little old home as they did at this time, when the sweet little bride was to go out from its walls and away to a far country.

And within the cottage hearts and brains and hands had been just as busy getting ready for the occasion and for her departure. From the hour school was out till the very last day before the wedding Janey and her mother had been planning, sewing, and packing; Lu and Madeline lending all the aid they could when household tasks and garden work were not demanding them. Each one was given

some share in the work of making the dainty garments that were needed to make up her simple and serviceable wardrobe. The wedding dress alone was untouched by any hands save those of Mrs. Warren.

"Let me do this all by myself," she had pleaded that morning when the package was opened out on the table and she lifted almost reverently the folds of soft white material from its tissue wrappings. "I am selfish, I know, in wanting every stitch of this to be mine; but I've made the wedding dresses for more than half the brides of this town for many a year now, and I would that no one else have part in the making of my own little daughter's. It is the one thing I ask. It is all I can do for her now."

And no one, not even Madeline, offered to disturb or relieve her of her self-appointed task, as with tender hands she cut and fashioned the material according to her own desire, completing it finally after many a loving stitch, a beautiful garment in its simplicity and purity.

Ned did everything a boy could do about the place, caring for the lawn, trimming vines and shrubs, and making small repairs here and there where needed. Lu planned the wedding luncheon, and for once reveled in the liberty accorded her of having just what she wanted to carry out her plans. And it was her hands and Madeline's that decorated all the rooms early on the bridal morning with sweet wild roses. Everywhere they placed them, filling vase and bowl and glass and other receptacles, besides twining them above windows and doorway, while the



“‘Reckon the old place don’t seem jest as homelike and natural, son, as it used to ’fore you went to workin’ in the bank an’ runnin’ round back thar in them well-settled States,’ remarked Mr. Gibson.” (See page 281.)





bridal bouquet itself consisted of nothing more or less than long sprays of the wild pink beauties, interspersed with a few forget-me-nots.

It was all over at last, the quiet little wedding with its accompanying smiles through tears. With that dignity and quiet grace that always characterized his manner, Elder Clayton had performed the simple, beautiful ceremony which joined them for life, though his voice had trembled and broken slightly once or twice before he finished the solemn rite.

The dainty luncheon was served entirely by Lu and Mamie, Madeline and Ned, and the moments passed speedily till the time for departure. Exchanging the bridal dress for a rose-colored suit, and looking fairer and sweeter than the fairest of blossoms, the little bride went away with her husband, away from the quiet peace and shelter of the humble home, out into the great, wide vineyard, to answer the Master's call for workers, and wild rose petals drooped sympathetically with the hearts left behind.

Not many days later the warm July sun looked down upon the softly rolling billows of the Pacific, and smiled benignly on a certain magnificent ocean liner, plowing its way across the blue waters. The vessel was several days out of port. In a quiet corner of the main deck Robert was reclining rather languidly in one of the big steamer chairs. Yesterday had been his first respite from seasickness, and to-day he had ventured on deck. His wife had just tucked the steamer rug comfortably about him and

ran off gayly to answer the call of some new acquaintance, with the promise to be back in a few moments. Robert smiled at the bright face till it disappeared around the corner, watched eagerly and a little impatiently a short time for her return, then fell into a retrospective mood which changed occasionally into vaguely defined plans for future work.

The cool breeze blew about him with invigorating freshness and half dreamily he lived over again the days and events just prior to his departure from home. This retrospection took him back, first to the short visit he had made to Clifton City at commencement time. It had been a happy chance that had afforded him this opportunity. A business man and friend of his in Banforth, whose son was graduating from the dentistry department, was to drive over in his car for the commencement exercises and invited Robert to accompany him on the two-day trip, an unexpected treat which the young man felt he could not afford to miss, and he had gone. Many of the old students he had known had finished their work and gone away, and others, who like himself had been unable to finish the desired course, he missed from among the throng. Yet many were still there of his old acquaintances, both of the student body and faculty, whom it was a pleasure to Robert to meet again.

That evening he went up to the little room under the eaves which he had once occupied. It smelled stuffy and close, and a few cobwebs across the win-

dow and in the corner proved conclusively that it was unoccupied.

"No fellow here this winter quite so hard up as I was, evidently," Robert had mused with a smile, brushing the cobwebs away with his hand and peering out the dusty little window at the factory chimneys and spires below and the scene beyond. The next morning he climbed again the hill to the top of the great rock on the edge of the cliff just in time to see the sun rise slowly from its crimson-draped couch and begin its gradual ascent into the blue heavens. This time no dark cloud pushed its way athwart the clear, serene sky; no shadow hovered threateningly near. Far below the brilliancy and glory of this scene, and reflecting it but partially in her clear waters, Silver River pursued her even course. As with Robert, so had she now passed that wavering, uncertain portion of her life's journey, and was moving steadfastly and with definite purpose towards the goal.

The memory of this scene and its tenor caused Robert's mind to revert quickly to another that stood out clearly and distinctly among the very recent events. It was the last few moments which he had had with his mother alone, and above the rhythm of the waves as they splashed against the sides of the steamer, he seemed again to hear her parting words:

"Son," she had whispered, "in my girlhood days I gave up all that young people usually count dear, for the gospel's sake. Money, position, friends, loved ones dear to me by the ties of nature. The

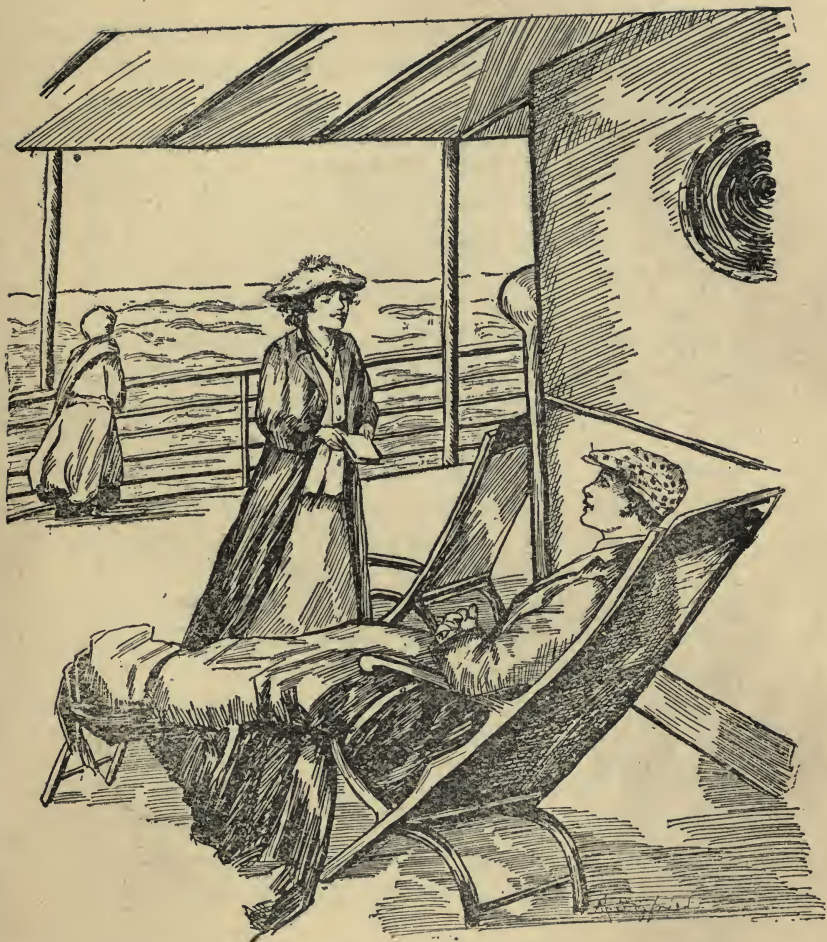
years brought their due proportion of trials, vexations, and sore perplexities. My people who turned me away long ago have never relented. To them I have become as an outcast. There have been some hardships and privations, and sometimes the comforts of life have been lacking; but to-day there are no regrets in my heart save for the mistakes I have unintentionally made at times. The gospel of Jesus Christ is still the greatest thing in the world to me. It is the pearl of great price, which, having found, one need not want for anything else. I count it not a hardship, but a privilege to speed you forth in His great mission work, for had I ten sons I could ask no greater honor than that they might be message bearers of truth in His vineyard."

This had been his mother's parting blessing. They were the words with which she had unselfishly yielded him up and sent him forth as she had ever been willing to relinquish all things for the Master's sake. Unconsciously a tear stole out of the corner of his eye at the remembrance of her endurance and faith, and his hand was raised quickly to brush it away.

"God has been exceedingly good to me in giving me first the blessing of such a wonderful mother, and now this equally wonderful wife. With such a mother to rear him, and such a companion, a man ought to be able to accomplish some good, and I'll be a poor stick if I don't."

His thoughts were arrested at this instant and his eyes brought back from their gaze to the far-off





"I didn't make the agreement to do all the preaching and talking. I only bargained to be a missionary's helpmate."

horizon at the appearance of Janey as she came hurrying back across the deck. She was comfortably attired for the cool sea breeze, in a long coat and soft cap. Brown wisps of hair blew breezily about her face, and her eyes were bright and earnest as she came toward him, notebook and pencil in hand.

"Do hurry and become a good sailor like I am, Robert," she laughingly teased as she approached. "What do you think! These people around here are putting the questions to me so fast I can hardly answer them. You see I didn't make the agreement to do all the preaching and talking. I only bargained to be a missionary's helpmate. But since I'm into the argument on baptism with a minister who flatly declares that baptism isn't a saving ordinance, and that it's only the outward sign of an inward grace, I want to know where that passage is you so often quote about baptism for the remission of sins. Some of Paul's teachings, I think. Do tell me. I never can remember just where it is found."

"Peter, not Paul," corrected Robert, "and you'll find it in Acts 2:38, where Peter on the Day of Pentecost talked to the people. You mean the one where he said, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost?'"

"That's the one," replied Janey. "I always get Peter and Paul mixed up. Any other places on the same point?"

"Yes, you'll find similar statements in Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3," he answered, then added as she quickly jotted them down in her notebook: "I won't undertake to promenade the deck yet, and to go flitting hither and thither as you do; but if you'll induce those people to come here I'll relieve you of some of your missionary burdens; though I doubt if I can make half so good a preacher," he finished with an admiring look.

"Do you think you are really strong enough?"

"Feeling fine and improving every minute. Bring them along. Only promise to bring yourself back and stay."

She was gone and back in a short time, accompanied by several people, one a tall, scholarly-looking gentleman of ministerial type, his wife and daughter, also a middle-aged couple bound for Australia. Chairs were soon found and the topic of conversation having already been launched, the group was soon deep in a lively discussion on the necessity for baptism, mode, and so on, and certain other doctrinal subjects, such as present-day revelation, the ordinance of the laying on of hands for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, and divine calling.

Thus did our young friends begin the labors of a long and foreign mission on board the great, west-bound liner, as it steadily pursued its way across the mighty waters.

## CHAPTER 29

## FROM NEAR AND FAR

THERE WERE many changes in the personnel of the branch in Banforth that fall—changes which brought their heartaches to more than one; nevertheless, the latter were well hidden beneath cheerful faces, as each one valiantly took up his own burden.

Elder Clayton had accompanied Robert and Janey as far as San Francisco, then went to his mission field in Oregon. Left thus alone for the year, without either the husband or son, Mrs. Clayton decided that since Mamie was to enter Graceland College she might as well go with her as to remain at home alone. Accordingly she made arrangements to rent the home for a year, and the latter part of August found them on their way to Lamoni. Furnished rooms were rented on their arrival, and the mother obtaining a few student boarders was thus enabled to meet a portion of her own and Mamie's expenses. Ned followed them a few weeks later, securing sufficient work at the college farm outside of school hours to earn his board. Ned had hesitated a long time about venturing into college work so soon and with so little money, besides feeling that he was needed at home; but his mother, knowing how his heart was set on it, declared herself well able to continue her sewing



and make sufficient to keep herself and the two girls, and Lu had joined her in urging him to go.

Elder Elldon, having been appointed to labor in the district and to take Robert's place as president of the Banforth Branch, moved his family there early in the summer and took charge of the work. On Billy's return from Dakota, after his vacation, he was ordained priest of the branch and appointed as bishop's agent of the district.

So, notwithstanding all the changes and the loss of several who had been their leading workers, the affairs of both branch and district were not neglected. Work there was in plenty for everyone, both those at home and abroad who were willing to give service, and work is God's great blessing to mankind. A hint of the activities of these young people during the autumn and early winter, in their now widely divergent and separated fields of labor, is given in a number of holiday letters. Lu's, written in the quiet of home New Year's morning in her off-hand, spontaneous way, brought a measure of cheer, all out of proportion to its length, to the homesick sister across the waters, though it was not altogether without its hidden touch of pathos. A peep into it over Janey's shoulder reveals the following bits of homey news:

*"Dear Janey:* I've just finished making my New Year's resolutions. They are two in number. The first is, I've resolved to write to you regularly once a week, no matter if there isn't a steamer to carry them that often. The second, to try to act sane and

sensible and not make so many horrid blunders this year. The first one I fully expect to keep; but the latter—I'm fearful every minute I'll break it before the day is over.

"We approached the holiday season this year with trepidation, mother and Madeline and I, as doubtless you may guess, since it's the first time our household has undertaken to make merry at the festive season of the year with half the family away, to say nothing of a lot of our friends gone. Even Billy suddenly skylarked off to North Dakota again, this time to attend the wedding nuptials of his sister Sally, which were observed on Christmas morning. (So Meta Benders informed me last night.) Of course Billy's going made a lot of the work fall on some of the rest of us. Christmas entertainment was on hand, and other matters to be looked after at the church. I must say it was very inconsiderate of his sister to get married and call him home this time of the year when we needed him badly. However, matters went along fairly well, and nobody fussed or got jealous if some one else's boy or girl was asked to speak or sing more than theirs; that is, no one except Mr. Midsby, and we're so used to his tantrums they don't count. I sure was tired when it was over. It was, as you know, my first experience heading a proposition like that.

"Then Madeline and I had to plan for Christmas Day. Mother looked downcast when we talked about spending it alone, and there seemed no place to go.

That left us the only alternative, which was to get up a feast and invite somebody in. The first was easy since King Athamas,

“The last of his tribe, left gobbling alone,  
All his fattened companions now eaten and gone,”

was in captivity calmly awaiting his doom. He had gobbled up everything in sight and very accommodat-  
ingly covered his bones with good turkey flesh and fat, ready in turn to be gobbled.

“So you see killing and eating King Athamas isn’t so cannibalistic as it sounds. Madeline and I named him thus appropriately last summer when we discovered his nomadic proclivities, for of all roving turkeys in my experience he was the ‘rovingest.’ Doubtless you remember something of King Athamas, in the story of the ‘Golden Fleece,’ who was told by the Oracle that he must wander about till the wild beasts should eat him for their guest.

“Well, with him in the pen, a good twenty-pounder, plenty of pumpkins in the cellar, and an abundance of milk and eggs, a successful feast was unquestioned.

“But when it came to the invitations—ah, here was a difficulty. Our dearest friends were out of town, our second best were either invited out or having family dinners of their own. Circumstances seemed against us, but about that time Madeline and I had a bright idea. We happened to remember that the Scriptures said something about what to do when you make a feast. We got out our Bible and hunted

it up. It said that when you make a feast you are to call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Funny how prone we are to dodge some of the commandments, till they suit our convenience, or we are hedged up in some way and obliged to keep 'em. It only shows that the average human creatures need adversity occasionally to shake 'em out of their selfishness and set 'em thinking. I suppose it's best for us, though the shaking isn't agreeable as I'd like.

"However, here was our opportunity, and we would go out into the highways and byways of Banforth and bring them in. Not so easily done as said. We canvassed the town in our minds and discovered that so far as we knew there wasn't an underfed person within its limits. Three relief societies kept the possibly needy ones amply supplied with food and clothing. There wasn't a cripple to be seen, and the only blind boy we knew of had gone away to school. Everyone was provokingly well and prosperous, and at a time, too, when we had the best of intentions.

"Finally we heard of a widow and family who lived a little way out of town. Having recently moved into the community, they were strangers to nearly everyone, and were said to be in need, so we were directed there on our errand of good will. We went and asked, they came and ate. There was a grandmother who was a little nearsighted, and one of the boys had fallen off the barn the day before and was slightly maimed in the head, so our guests approached the proper description after all. We were rewarded for



our good works before the day was over. Farmer Grayson drove to town with his big bobsled, and took us all out to his place to spend the evening. We had a dandy ride, and a good time fixing up the jolliest little Christmas tree in the best room of the farmhouse. Elder Elldon gave us a beautiful talk on the Christmas theme, and it was late when we came home, the moonlight bright upon the snow. The sleighing has been fine for a month.

"The rest of the events of the week have been quite ordinary, with Madeline and I helping mother and trying to get some school clothes made. This having to wait for letters from you for weeks is tiresome business. Mother always said I needed to cultivate patience. This is giving me a splendid opportunity. I wish some philanthropist would establish a daily steamship line, or some inventor a quicker means of communication. Good-by till next week.

"Lu.

"P. S.—Four p. m. Billy got back to-day."

The second letter was from Ned, headed at Grace-land College, Lamoni, Iowa, and addressed to Lu. In typical boy fashion it began:

"*Dear Sis:* It's some lonesome out here these two weeks with half the students gone home, a fourth of them housed with friends, and the remaining unlucky fourth short of money and hunting jobs or else wandering idly around trying to pass the time until the holidays are over. Luckily I chance to be among those who have a job and am doing hauling for a

man in the country. I hope it will hold out till college opens.

"Five more days and the deserted dormitories and college will be filled again and there'll be plenty going on. They'll all be glad to get back, too. And that makes me think. There's something funny about this place. I haven't quite made it out yet, but I've been watching the students and listening to them talk ever since I came. They're the most loyal set I ever saw. Maybe when they first came they felt disappointed about some things. They mostly do. The buildings aren't as fine as they expected or the college isn't run just according to their idea.

"I confess to a feeling of this sort myself when I first came. The town wasn't so big as I had thought it would be, and so quiet that I wondered why the headquarters of the church had been set away off here among these rolling prairies. Then I began to wonder if I hadn't made a mistake in coming here to college instead of going to the big one at Clifton City which was nearer home.

"But I notice the most of the students get over this feeling after they've been here awhile, and I find I'm like the rest of them. There's something here that draws you closer and makes you like it better every day, and the longer a student stays the longer he wants to stay. I know it isn't the location, though it's a beautiful one; nor the campus, which has wonderful possibilities if we had the money to develop them; neither is it the plain, unpretentious buildings, which makes the 'tie that binds.' The

first semester is not quite finished, and already I am more than content with my choice. In fact, I wouldn't trade some of my experiences since coming for those you could get in the biggest college or university in the land, for you get lessons here that can't be put into books.

"In the main the students are a fine lot, and they come from all parts of the country. The most of them are making a sacrifice to get here, or their parents are sacrificing for them, and they are here for work. Oh, there are a few idlers, of course, among them—there always are in any place, and they must drift out by and by as they have drifted in.

"But our instructors—I wish I could make you realize, sis, what a splendid bunch they are—the sacrifices they've made, some of them for years, and are still making for our sake. Prominent educators from other parts who happen in, marvel that men of their ability and achievement, who could make high honors out in the world, are willing to remain here and give their best with so little recompense, as they view it. I've almost wondered, too, at times, even with my ambitions, but the better I know them the more I admire their faith and purpose, which those other men cannot understand.

"People have told me that the way some of the higher studies are taught in many larger colleges and universities oftentimes makes skeptics of our young people. It isn't so with Graceland. Our men link up true science and religion in a way that makes your faith stronger than ever, and you wonder why you

never understood it before. The laws of true science, true religion, Lu, are all God-made, and they never clash. It is only a misunderstanding or a human interpretation of any of these laws that causes us to get mixed up on such things. I only wish you could hear our psychology instructor give some of his splendid lectures.

“As for athletics—you know how crazy I’ve been about them ever since Rob organized our club in Banforth. I received my first lessons in playing clean, square games from him back there in my high school days that I can never forget. We get a continuance of those kind of lessons here under a man who is conscientious in his work and thorough in his training.

“Everybody knows about the good work ‘Uncle Jerry’ has done and is still doing for Graceland, and there have doubtless been dozens whom I know nothing about who have done their part along the way in sustaining and working to make our college a power for good among the young people of the church.

“But a Graceland prayer meeting! If you spent a year here and didn’t attend one of our Wednesday night prayer meetings, you would go away without coming in touch with her spiritual, centralizing force. No, there’s nothing particularly spectacular about them, though the gifts of the Spirit are often manifest to a wonderful degree; but just listening to the prayers and testimonies of many of these earnest young people you can’t help feeling that God is near.



Our instructors are there as fellow workers with us, not above us, and I wish you could hear them tell of some of their experiences. As our Rob sacrificed his lifelong ambitions for the sake of missionary work, so are they sacrificing worldly position with its money and honor for Graceland's sake, and yet they, one and all, seem to feel as one of them said the other night in the meeting: "These things seem not to me now to be any sacrifice whatever; for if by these things, these sacrifices (if such they were) and by suffering and trials, my life has been made more tender, more nearly like the pattern given by the Master, I shall be well repaid. And I would not give one hour under the tender ministrations of the Spirit as we receive it here, for a lifetime spent amid the pleasures and honors of the world.'

"It's wonderful, sis, and can't be described. The power which influences men to have such faith and devotion can only be felt, and I hope to learn how to labor and consecrate my life so that I may be prepared, in the years to come, to help support and sustain our school as these men are now doing.

"Well, so long. Don't think I've gone daffy over the subject, but if you ever hear anybody say anything against Graceland, just refer them to your big brother.

"That Christmas cake and baked chicken and apples you sent last week were great. I invited four of the boys up to my room that evening and we had some feast, I tell you. All declared it was the best ever. I know you and mother are making a sacri-

fice for me this winter, and I hope I can return it in part some day by helping you to get that longed-for course in music after you've finished high school.

"Your big brother,

"NED."

The remaining letter was postmarked at an island in the Pacific, and brought its wealth of affection and newsy bits from the faithful little heart over the seas.

*Dear Ones at Home:* It is the day before Christmas, and I have been making some pies, or rather one pie, and a piece of another (made of the left overs). While doing so I cut my finger on my bread board! Can you imagine it? Lu would scorn such a board, I fear, and the domestic science teachers would surely hold up their hands aghast. They tell us to use a marble slab when mixing pie crust, but I guess a broken pane of glass is just as good, even if it doesn't sound quite so elegant. Anyhow it serves the purpose when you can't find anything better. My rolling-pin—promise not to laugh—is an old beer bottle, the kind legacy of the former occupants of the house. Now don't feel sympathetic, for you would be surprised how well this combination works. I fear I shall have to put a patent on it yet, when other people get acquainted with its virtues.

"We are getting along fine now, and adding constantly, if slowly, to our household equipment. One of our friends here has promised the loan of his desk, which we covet earnestly. When we get it I

think I'll do better at the writing proposition. My typewriter table now is a goods box. This same box turned over another way seats part of my Sunday school class on Sundays. Blessed be the man who invented dry goods boxes, for he surely served poor missionaries a good turn when he did it.

"Yesterday I made a box of fudge apiece for my Sunday school class. Robert helped me. We fixed up a number of little bonbon boxes, and I had a few scraps of narrow ribbon and gilt cord with which to tie them up. We made divinity and chocolate fudge and mixed the two. That is all the Christmas presents I have ventured to prepare. I want to get something for Robert. Don't know what yet, as his mind seems to waver between socks and suspenders. We have lots of fun over our poverty-stricken condition, and make the best of things as they are, and in this our experiences are not unlike those of others. Financial straits seem to be a part of missionary life.

"The last mail before Christmas came this morning. Wasn't that lovely? And I want to tell you how perfectly splendid all my Christmas presents were. First came the package from home, with its dainty tokens of love from all of you. Next came a ten-dollar bill in a registered letter from Mother Clayton and Mamie. How could they spare it, I wonder? Then a check for ten dollars from the home Sunday school. And from somebody and somewhere a letter containing only a blank sheet of paper folded about another ten. Not a word of any kind as a clue to the sender, and the postmark is a strange one. I

wish we knew who to thank for it. We feel quite rich, and I can assure you we can make good use of all of it.

"We fixed up a little jewel of a darkroom, and are busy in our spare time making pictures for a book we have which we think is going to be something wonderful when the camera is allowed to tell the tale of all our wanderings.

"I love these people here, and in spite of the difficulties and perplexities that confront one, I am glad we came. Sometimes I feel ashamed at my own lack of faith and courage when I see the manifestations of such great faith in their lives, and their humility and simplicity. How glad I shall be when all people may rejoice in 'His love,' and more especially do I feel this way since I have seen with my own eyes those who worship idols. But in many instances the white missionaries have not bettered matters. They have come to them with the Bible in one hand and the whisky bottle in the other, and even some of the little folks are sharp enough to see these inconsistencies.

"Yes, I truly love these people, and I enjoy the work here, with them, but I need to be a great deal more efficient than I am. What a responsibility it is to try to carry the message of the Master, and who can feel worthy to do it? Never forget to pray in our behalf, that our efforts may bear fruit in this far-off corner of the Master's vineyard.

"Lovingly and faithfully,

"JANEY."



## CHAPTER 30

## "ONLY A PLODDER"

November lays her quiet hand  
O'er all the waiting autumn land,  
And bids for one brief hour of peace  
The wild wail of the north winds cease;  
While veiled in tender azure haze  
Come golden Indian summer days.

November hours are strangely still,  
No flower is hers on vale or hill,  
No singing bird beside the way  
Calls where the robin sang in May,  
And swings the oriole's hammock nest  
A speck against the paling west.

November fields are brown and sere,  
Gathered the harvest of the year;  
But sweet as hours of royal June  
This one late golden afternoon,  
When over all the autumn land  
November lays her quiet hand.

—Lillian E. Andrews.

LATE winter passed quietly away and merged itself gradually into spring. Again the roses of June came, with their fragrance and their memories, and drifted away. Another season's harvest was gathered, and the brooding stillness of Indian summer days had come. It was one of those golden afternoons described in the little poem above,

one of restful peace, of tender skies, of purple haze showered through with mellow sunlight.

"Lu, oh, Lu; where are you?" Mrs. Warren's voice did not carry far, even in the quiet atmosphere, as she stood on the kitchen doorstep and called. She looked thinner and more frail than a year ago, and her voice had lost something of its old-time strength and cheeriness. A fretful look, so unaccustomed to finding lodgment there, paused on her brow a moment almost in surprise at its own daring, then slipped hurriedly away.

"Where can the girl be? I wonder," she mused, thoughtfully. "I heard her here in the kitchen a moment ago. The cleaning is finished, but she hasn't had time to change her dress since; besides, she never goes far without letting me know. Well, maybe it's just as well. The Saturday's work has been heavy, and the walk to Mrs. Drake's with the dress would be a long one. I'll just phone her and perhaps she can send one of the boys over for it."

She paused on the doorstep a moment longer, in the warmth of the sunshine, then turned indoors with something of a repressed sigh, and after getting a favorable answer from her telephone call, she folded the completed garment carefully, together with the remnants of material left, and wrapped them in a neat bundle. Then, contrary to her custom, without closing the machine or picking up the bits of thread and scraps on the carpet, she lay down

on the couch and closed weary eyelids, dropping at once into restful slumber.

. . . . .

It would have taken a much stronger call than Mrs. Warren's to have reached Lu at that time, though the distance from the kitchen door to her whereabouts was not a great one. It would have been evident to anyone who knew her that something out of the ordinary had been on the girl's mind all day. As was her custom, under such circumstances, she had worked silently and with steadily increasing haste, until by the middle of the afternoon, the Saturday's work almost done and her strength well-nigh exhausted, she had given mop and broom a final fling as she reached the last porch step, and fled to the quiet seclusion of the old barn loft. There, high up in the haymow, with the warm, golden sunshine streaming in through the wide-open window upon her, she had thrown herself face down in the midst of the soft piles of sweet-smelling hay, and lay a rebellious and disconsolate little heap of tense muscles and overwrought nerves.

"I just can't ever do it—I know I can't," she repeated over and over, her voice muffled in the hay, the dry sobs rising up in her throat and refusing to be lowered. "Ned would come home quicker than scat if he knew it—and I just know it wouldn't be so hard for him as it is for me. He's a lot farther along than I am anyhow."

The small brown hands, roughened a trifle with

the Saturday's cooking and scrubbing, and reddened with two or three slight burns, clenched their supple fingers, and the throbbing little figure grew quiet for a few moments. Then she rolled over on one side and wailed disconsolately:

"Oh, dear! Why did things have to happen this way? If I hadn't had to miss a little school now and then all the way along I could have gotten through at as early an age as Janey did. It wasn't my fault I didn't—and now—now, I must give it up, and just a few months before graduation, too. Or else I'll have to write Ned and call him home from Graceland. I don't want to do that—I can't bear to do it, while he's so anxious to get through with his second year, and yet—I just can't give up to stay at home myself and do the work and most of the sewing. But somebody's *got* to do something. Mother's breaking down. I can see it more plainly every day, and either Ned must come home and earn the living and maybe miss out altogether on the rest of the college course, or I must stop school and lift the burden from mother."

Again there was silence for a time in the old hay-mow, while outside, under the eaves, a half dozen sparrows scolded and chattered, and high up in the nests in the gable the gentle pigeons flew in and out, or perched on the roof and cooed to their mates.

"It isn't fair—it isn't right to have to give up everything." The words were muffled in the hay again. "Last year we had to lose Janey, and then in the fall, a little while after, to let Ned go away.



The home isn't ever like it used to be any more, with them gone—and now—if I have to give up school, too, there just isn't anything the same. Oh, why couldn't it be so I could finish?"

She tossed restlessly over to the other side and looked out at the bright sunshine. A pair of snow-white pigeons alighted on the window ledge near and cooed softly.

"I just hate to sew," Lu continued so fiercely that the gentle-voiced birds looked up, startled. "I get so fidgety. I've always vowed I'd never do it. I feel, after I've sewed a few days, like I wanted to fly away. If I could cook, or do something like that, I wouldn't mind it so much."

The pair on the ledge tilted their heads to one side and eyed her with quiet concern.

"Mother never would have broken down so quickly if Janey hadn't gone so far away," she soliloquized. "I've watched her ever since, and I know she's grieving, though she'd never own it in the world, and she's growing thinner and paler every day. It's been a hard task for mother to raise her little brood of birdlings all alone, but it's harder yet for her to see them flying off out into the big world and leaving her alone. It's taking the courage and life out of her a good deal faster than it did to plan and scheme how to fill the hungry mouths when we were all in the home nest. What a dear, patient mother she has been, and what a restless, impatient little bunch we were—(that is, I have been) to try our wings. Well,

one of us, at least, has surely taken a long enough flight, and it will be many a day before she migrates back to the home nest. Who'd have dreamed two or three years ago that so much could happen in such a short space of time and we'd be so widely separated now? Oh, I know the home can't ever be the same again—that's the hard part. School's the only place that seems as it used to, and now to have to leave all the girls and boys of our class in the senior year—"

Down she flopped in the hay again and turned her face away from the bright outdoor world. "I just can't do it—I know I can't. I'm too selfish. I'll write to Ned to-morrow—yes, I will," she declared still more fiercely. "It won't hurt him so badly to lose the remainder of this year, and then I'll stay at home the rest of my life, if necessary, but I won't do it this year, so there!"

Silence profound again in the haymow—a long continued one this time. The sparrows outside twittered more noisily than ever; the white pigeons had flown away from the window ledge into the garden.

Suddenly from out the stillness of the golden afternoon there came floating up to the haymow from somewhere below, the clear, sweet notes of Madeline's voice, whose tones still held that childlike simplicity and quality that betokened her innocent and trusting nature:

"'T may not be on the mountain's height,  
Or over the stormy sea;

It may not be at the battle's front,  
My Lord will have need of me;  
But if by a still, small voice he calls  
To paths that I may not know,  
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine,  
I'll go where you want me to go.

"I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,  
Over mountain, or plain, or sea;  
I'll *stay* where you want me to *stay*, dear Lord,  
I'll be what you want me to be."

Lu sat suddenly and stiffly erect. How strangely Madeline had paraphrased the last words of the chorus to harmonize with her situation!

"'It may not be at the battle's front,'" she repeated, "'my Lord will have need of me.' I guess the Lord called Robert and Janey to go 'over mountain height and stormy sea' all right, and I wonder if he truly wants me to take this path that I don't want to take. Strikes me it's a mighty humdrum way, but I suppose if the Lord wants me there I ought to '*stay* where he wants me to *stay*,' as Madeline sings it, and not make any fuss about it. Well—"

There was a long pause, then slowly great burning, smarting tears welled up in the girl's eyes and rolled over her cheeks. "I guess the Lord thinks I can't do anything that amounts to much anyhow, and I might as well do this. He knows I haven't any special gifts or talents, and he thinks it doesn't make any difference whether I finish school or not. I'll never have any accomplishments like Janey, nor be able to sing like Madeline, nor be sweet and ladylike

like either, and I'm not so smart and quick as Ned. I think the good gifts must all have been boxed up somewhere and the cover nailed down tight, when I was made, or else all on hand had been distributed. Anyhow, my work and place don't seem to be very important."

From the farther corner of the garden, whither Madeline had gone in search of the willful Cleopatra's nest, the strains of another stanza came now less distinctly:

" 'There's surely somewhere, a lowly place  
In earth's harvest field so wide,  
Where I may labor through life's short day  
For Jesus, the Crucified;  
So trusting my all to thy tender care,  
And knowing thou lovest me,  
I'll do thy will with a heart sincere,  
I'll be what you want me to be.

" 'I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,  
Over mountain or plain or sea,  
I'll *stay* where you want me to *stay*—' "

The voice drifted off in the distance and ceased altogether as the younger sister discovered the object of her search under a clump of frosted and blackened tomato vines, and Lu was again left undisturbed in her meditations.

The sun had descended an hour lower in the western sky, and the hazy veil was hanging heavier about the hills, when at last the girl picked herself up out of the hollow she had made in the hay, brushed away the wisps and dead leaves that clung



to her old, soft cotton dress, and slowly descended the ladder to the ground. Equally as slow, and still meditatively, with head bent low and gaze fixed upon the ground, she started back toward the house.

"Hello, there! What absorbing cogitations make you so heedless of consequences as to almost run over a fellow like that?" And Lu looked up with a start to see Billy dodging with mock concern out of her pathway.

"Goodness! How you scared me! Why didn't you tell me you were there?"

"I did—just in time to save myself. Christopher Columbus! Lu, where have you been?" he ejaculated, stepping back again and plucking a long weed and several spears of dry grass from her hair. "You look like you'd been through a threshing machine and escaped with considerable of the chaff left."

"I have. Couldn't be otherwise when it was mostly chaff to begin with," Lu answered, with an uncomfortable knowledge of her red, tear-stained eyes, soiled dress, and disheveled locks, and fervently wishing the young man were out of the State or anywhere else but standing there blocking her pathway. Besides, he was looking at her in a quizzical, half-amused, half-serious way that was a trifle disconcerting.

"What are you doing here this time of day? Why aren't you at the bank at work?"

"If you please, Miss Lu," said Billy, with a low bow, "my day's work at the bank has been completed after the most approved business methods. Aren't

you aware that it is Saturday afternoon and past four o'clock, after which I am a gentleman of leisure? You are not a bit polite when I come to make a call. Why don't you say you're glad I came, and invite me to stay to supper, instead of asking why I am not at work?"

"Why, I didn't know it was so late, but how can I when you stand right in my way; besides,

"Any vagrant that comes begging  
For a bite at the kitchen door,  
Is not allowed to enter  
And mar a fresh-scrubbed floor."

"Zounds! Lu, you're a most extemporaneous poet. Why don't you cultivate the muse more often?"

"Too elusive. Anyhow, I've learned that great gifts are not for me. Let the gifted sing and write and paint; I'm only a plodder," Lu said, stepping to one side and making a circuit past him, and walking steadily up the path with shoulders erect and head carried high. He turned and followed her, still amused, yet secretly wondering at her mood.

"When did you find that out?"

"Just this afternoon out in the haymow, where I've been summing up my stock of gifts. It was easy to come to the conclusion."

"Hum-m!" Billy mused thoughtfully. "I hope you won't take such an inventory of the qualities of your friends, unless you are more charitable."

"Oh, I took yours long ago," retorted the girl, quickly.

Billy laughed, in sudden recollection. "Why, so you did, Lu. I recall it vividly. The very first time I ever saw you. Whew! but I suffered under your scathing criticisms then. Haven't you revised your estimate of accounts and placed more to my credit since that time? Honest, now?"

"I daren't say. Some people can't stand flattery, or even well deserved commendation."

"Well, then, how stands the cooky jar? A dozen cookies will answer the purpose quite as well, and I'll forgive all the cold, hard, impolite things you say, and even a tramp may venture on to a clean-scrubbed floor if he's just had his shoes polished," the young man replied good-humoredly, holding the screen door open for her and following serenely in.

"There isn't a cooky left, if that's what you're hunting," said Madeline, coming in the opposite door at that moment and overhearing his last remarks. "I ate the last one yesterday, and you promised me faithfully this morning, Lu, to make some doughnuts, and you haven't done it."

"Why, so I did, little sister," said Lu, regretfully. "I forgot all about it. What a pity, and you two youngsters so nearly starving, too! Never mind, I'll have time to make them yet before supper."

"I'll help you, if you'll let me," said Madeline. "I just love to help make doughnuts."

"Can't I help, too?" asked Billy.

"Sure, you can both help. There's a big apron behind the door, and, Madeline, you may get the eggs and milk from the cellar. I'll be back in a moment,"

and Lu disappeared up the stairway on the way to her room, where she hurriedly dashed her face and eyes with cold water, hastily smoothed her hair, and slipped out of the old brown dress she wore only when doing the cleaning, into a fresh gingham. When she returned to the kitchen, Billy, the big checked apron fastened around him, was seated on the high kitchen stool, industriously wielding the egg beater, while Madeline was fluttering about the kitchen stove, fixing the fire and putting the lard to melt in the kettle.

"Let me turn 'em," said Billy a little later, as he stood watching with the greatest interest while Lu dropped the circles of dough into the hot grease. "It's fun to see 'em puff up, and a fellow gets the first chance at them that way."

"No, that's my job," said Madeline. "Lu always lets me do that."

"Here, take a fork, each of you," said Lu, judiciously, "and turn them over and lift them from the kettle. Now don't get in such a hurry that you take them out before they are fully done," she admonished.

"Aren't they beauties?" said Billy, admiringly, peering into the kettle and jealously guarding one which looked especially tempting.

"This one's mine," said Madeline, mischievously. "Don't you dare take it, Billy Gibson. Ladies should be served first."

"Ouch! This one's hot! How long does it take 'em to cool, Lu?" Billy asked, having fished one out,



and leaving the remainder to Madeline's care, was proceeding to dispose of it at once.

"A trifle longer than it takes by such rapid transportation to get it from the kettle to your mouth, I should suppose," she replied, with calm unconcern, watching his gyrations about the room. "I'd advise you to wait at least ten seconds," she added, dryly. "You'd enjoy it more."

"Lu, you are positively inconsistent," remarked Billy, "to make doughnuts like these and then expect a fellow to let them alone till they get cold. These are the most delicious, delectable things in the shape of circles I ever ate. I wish you could have tasted one like I had at the restaurant last night. A city-imported product made out of leather and axle-grease, judging from its consistency and flavor. You'd make a small fortune if you'd put your doughnuts and cookies on the market, besides doing a charitable act for the people who have to subsist on bakery stuff."

Lu, who had been giving little heed to his effusion, at his last sentence now looked up with sudden interest from the dough she was molding at the board.

"Why, so I might," she agreed. "That's quite an idea, Billy. It takes a financier to figure some things out, I see."

"Now there's Thanksgiving coming on next week—"

"Why, so it is," she acquiesced, laying the piece

of dough down on the board and forgetting to roll it out.

"And think of the many people," he continued, "that would like to get hold of doughnuts like these, to say nothing of good, homemade pumpkin pies. There's my landlady, for instance, can't make a pie fit for a cat to eat, and buys most of her stuff ready made. If I couldn't get to the cooky jar here once in awhile, and out to Aunt Jane's occasionally, I'd starve to death."

"Well, you act like you're starved, though you don't look much like it," declared Madeline, frankly. "Now this next one belongs to me; you've had three already."

Strangely quiet and thoughtful was Lu while she finished the doughnuts and began preparations for supper. Madeline and Billy chatted gayly and tried in vain to arouse her from her preoccupation.

After supper was over and Billy gone, the work for the day completed, and Madeline had gone across the street to visit with one of her friends, in the quiet of the sitting room, with no light save the flickerings from the little wood stove, Lu drew her chair up near the couch where her mother was still resting, and had a long and serious talk. The plans she unfolded you may be sure met with remonstrance on the part of the mother; a remonstrance, however, which soon gave way before the girl's determined will and convincing arguments.

"You know you must not continue a day longer as

you are doing," she said in conclusion. "We do not want to call Ned home. It will greatly interfere with his work and plans if he has to return this year. I'll stay out this winter and finish next year. It will be with another class, of course," her voice faltered a trifle, "but that need not make so much difference. Let me try my plan, and promise me you won't tell Ned till spring, and forbid Madeline mentioning it either. If he finds out what I am doing he'll quit straight off and come home. Will you promise, please, mother?"

And the mother, realizing her own waning strength, and her inability to carry longer the heavy responsibilities she had borne for years, promised.

## CHAPTER 31

## THE NEW BAKERY

HOMEMADE PUMPKIN PIES  
DOUGHNUTS  
BROWN BREAD—BAKED BEANS  
COOKIES and SPICE CAKE

*For Your Thanksgiving Dinner*

On sale at the  
BROWN COTTAGE  
Send in your order early

SUCH was an attractive advertisement which appeared in the *Banforth News* the following Monday afternoon and brought a quick and encouraging response. Orders began to come almost before the paper was fairly distributed, and by Wednesday noon they had reached such proportions as to keep Lu working far into the night to supply the Thanksgiving trade. Her reputation as a cook was well known among all the young people of the town and it needed little else to bring her patronage.

At least one individual was thoroughly astounded when he read the advertisement that first evening. "Great Cæsar!" he exclaimed, "What's she going to do that for? She ought not to quit school now. Can they be in need? I wonder that Ned allows it. There must be something the matter."



Down went the paper on the floor, and finding his hat, he was at once on his way to the cottage. He arrived just as Lu was taking her first order over the telephone.

"Yes—five dozen doughnuts, did you say, Mrs. McGlee? . . . And how much brown bread? . . . Oh, yes—all right. I'll have it for you by Wednesday morning. Thank you. Good-by."

"Lu, what does that ad in the paper mean?" Billy confronted her as she hung up the receiver. "Are you going to quit school right now, within an inch of graduating?"

"It looks that way," replied the girl, steadily.

"Are you crazy?"

"Doubtless. But I'm only following out your own suggestion."

"*My* suggestion!" he ejaculated, trying vainly to remember anything he had said approaching such a thought, and forgetful of the episode of the Saturday before. "*My* suggestion!"

"Truly, you are largely responsible for the venture."

"How? pray inform."

"Well, being of a charitable turn of mind, I've decided to try to make pies fit for the cats, and keep hungry boarders from starving, and likewise accumulate that small fortune you predicted I could. See, I have an order already—five dozen doughnuts and three loaves of brown bread. How's that for a start?" And Lu held up the slip of paper on which she was making notes when he came in.

"Lu, you must not do it. There's no sense in it," remonstrated Billy.

"But I must, and there are *cents*, and I hope dollars."

"I say you shan't," said the young man, authoritatively.

"But I shall," she declared, independently.

"I'll write Ned at once and tell——"

"Indeed you'll not do anything of the kind," Lu's eyes flashed fire; "and if you do, Billy Gibson, I'll never speak another word to you nor tell you another thing."

"Now listen, Lu——"

"Now listen, Billy—mother's not able to sew any longer. She is simply getting weaker every day, and I can't stand it. If I don't quit school and look after her and make the living, she'll give out. Can't you see it? Besides, if Ned came home he couldn't take care of mother as I can."

Billy stood silent for a moment. "And you mean to shoulder the entire responsibility of doing the housework and the bread winning for the family?"

"Perhaps. Though it looks more like bread making than bread winning to me."

"I'm certainly sorry I blundered into putting such a notion into your head."

"I'm not. If you hadn't I'd have sewed instead, and I detest sewing."

"What do you think Ned and Janey would say if they knew?"

"Janey couldn't do anything to help if she did

know, and it would only worry her. I don't want her to know—and please, Billy, promise me you won't tell Ned. He must finish another year at Graceland first.”

“Let me help you, then. I can easily arrange so that your mother can have enough money till school is out, without interest or at a very low rate, if you insist on paying something.”

Lu shook her head slowly. “No,” she said decisively, “I don't want to go in debt now, for it worries mother so. We've managed to get along so far, and I think we can make it through. It would be a couple of years perhaps before I could pay it back, and I'd rather not. Besides, I feel that mother needs some one right at home with her.”

Billy was not convinced. He argued, remonstrated, almost scolded, and threatened again to tell Ned or Janey, but Lu was firm and unyielding, and the result was she had her way and it ended, as had been the case with her mother, in his promise not to tell Ned. In consequence Lu carried out her plans and supplied a goodly portion of the bounties at a number of Thanksgiving feasts in Banforth that year, and thereby a steady patronage was assured. Ned's friends were interviewed and requested to keep silent about the matter to him. Lu wrote Mamie at once of her venture, asking her to keep it a secret, and Ned continued his studies at Graceland, happily unaware of the sacrifices that were being made at home.

So the little kitchen became a tiny bakery, where

Lu sang as she kneaded the dough and made puffy rolls and loaves, or stirred spicy mixtures for the cakes; and the sitting room was turned from a sewing room into a sales shop, where the windows daily displayed tasty brown doughnuts, crisp cookies, and tempting pies.

It was not long till she felt assured of the wisdom of her course. Mrs. Warren was failing even faster than anyone had realized, and rest and freedom from responsibility failed to bring about the speedy results Lu had hoped for. Many a winter's morning in the intervals of respite from her work, the girl stepped softly to the bedroom door and peered anxiously in where her mother lay on the couch in that exhausted slumber which betokens a weakened and overtaxed heart. As softly she would go away again with an inward pang at the whiteness of her face, but with a thankfulness that she was able in a great measure to lift and carry the burdens those shoulders had borne so long. Many a night she cuddled and kissed that mother good-night and wondered how long she would be permitted to treasure and keep her.



## CHAPTER 32

## COMMENCEMENT DAY

WILL the spring never come, Lu? I am so tired of waiting for the winter to be over. Are the violets almost ready to bloom on the hillside and on the little graves of my babies in the old cemetery?"

"Not yet, mother dear; but they will be soon. It will not be so very long now," Lu answered her mother many times that spring, even before the keen March winds had given place to April's softer breath. "It is only a few weeks until Maytime and the johnny-jump-ups will be popping up everywhere, and jack-in-the-pulpit will be on hand ready to deliver his first lecture, and you know Madeline will discover the very first blossom that dares to jump out of its warm bed. She never fails to find the earliest."

"I know she will. But the weeks seem long, and yet I know they are passing quickly, too, even as the years have passed since my first babies were laid away under the violets. It will soon be twenty-four years Lu, since your father and I buried the twin baby brother and sister that came before Janey was born. Our first babies, and they lived scarcely two years. How lonely it was after their death until Janey came to take their place in our hearts—no, not their place, but a place of her own. What sunshine

she brought into our home then, that had been bereft of baby voices so long! What sunshine each one of you brought as you came, one by one! You were such good children and you healed the ache in our hearts. How your father loved his little family and how proud of you he would have been to-day had he lived! Somewhere in the West among the mountains, where he was prospecting, doubtless his body still lies buried under a great avalanche of snow and debris. They could never find it to bring it home. I dreamed of him last night. He looked very happy, and his voice had that same old-time ring of cheeriness that won him many friendships and made bright the home. You are like him, Lu, full of that same hope and cheerfulness, yet impulsive and quick and high-spirited. How he used to laugh at your quaint, old-fashioned ways, as when such a tiny girl you insisted on helping me about the house, or trying to mother Baby Madeline. You were a domestic little thing from very babyhood, Lu."

Lu laughed with an odd feeling in her throat. "So I was, mother. It has been my only qualification. I don't seem to amount to much in other ways."

"Hush, child. You don't know what you are saying. Your gifts are undeveloped yet, and you have filled a place in the home no one else could fill. You have grown so kind and patient, and for your restless nature it is hard; but I don't know what I should do without my faithful girl. My girls and my boy have always been good to me. I wonder how long it will be until we hear from my far-away girl again."

"On the next steamer, mother. It will not be long until the next steamer will arrive with her letters."

"She has been gone a long time."

"Almost two years, mother dear. It will be two years this June."

"And three years yet till she comes home."

"Yes, but the time is passing more quickly than I could ever have thought it possible, and first thing we know it will have slipped away and Janey and Robert will be home and we shall all be together again," Lu said, cheerily.

The mother was silent for a little while and the conversation ended as usual, by her asking:

"Sing to me, Lu. I am very tired this evening. Will you sing the hymns and songs again which I have learned to love? Sing to me and I shall wait for the violets to come, and think of the time when Janey will be home again."

And so in the twilight, the day's work done, the little round of homely tasks finished, Lu sang the old hymns to her mother until twilight brooded into darkness, the hour for rest and sleep came again to the household, and anxiety was for a time forgotten.

But no one, not even Lu, suspected how close the mother was approaching the brink, and how faint the spark of life was glowing. Once, in the early spring, Lu saw indications of weakness that alarmed her. At this time she wrote to Janey and Ned more fully of conditions as they were, and had added a postscript in the latter message not to be surprised if she sent for him to come home at any time.

The violets bloomed at last on the hillsides and on the little graves, and deep in woodsy places they lifted their bright faces in a message of hope and comfort. With their coming also came a letter from Robert, telling of a dark-eyed baby girl that had come to their island home. That day was turned into a day of festivity and celebration at the brown cottage, and the happy event served to arouse Mrs. Warren from her lethargy, for a time to give her new interest and hope in life, and to stir her into activity. She wrote long letters to Janey and Robert and Ned, and even to Mrs. Clayton and Mamie. She left her couch and walked out into the warm sunshine and watched with something of her old interest the growing things in garden and flower beds. Occasionally she essayed to assist Lu with some of the lighter household tasks.

With the lessening of anxiety concerning her mother, Lu's thoughts turned again to happenings about her, among the young people, and to her own interests. Something of the old pangs came back as she watched her classmates passing daily or caught bits of gay news of their parties and activities. Now and then one or another dropped in to tell her of a picnic or ride or game, of their rivalry with the juniors, to ask her opinion concerning the class pin they had selected or to tell about the graduating dresses, and plans for commencement. Regrets would come in spite of herself. She was heartily ashamed of the fact that she sometimes harbored a little rebellion, but all these bright, happy things



were a part of the life she loved and had so greatly missed during the last year. As the time drew nearer and nearer towards the closing of school, her restlessness increased, and it became more difficult to patiently continue the monotonous round of little duties that always seemed clamoring to be done.

"You will be sure to come over to-night, will you not?" Dora Drake asked as the afternoon before commencement she stopped in at the brown cottage to see Lu for a moment and to get more roses for the decorations. "I am to get your certain, sure promise. The class want you to sit on the platform with them. We insist on it, dear, and all the teachers say so, too."

"I wouldn't want to do that, Dora. It wouldn't seem quite right for me to sit on the platform with you. I haven't earned that privilege yet, and I wouldn't want the place until I deserved it. Besides, I have no new dress to wear, and among all you pretty white butterflies, so newly garbed, I'd look like an ugly miller buzzing around the light and get my wings scorched, possibly. But I'll come," she added quickly, as she saw the look of disappointment on her friend's face. "Sarah's mother has promised to come over and stay with mother while I go, and if she is well enough I'll be there."

Things went well that afternoon, and it was with a little flutter of excitement that Lu, at an early hour, slipped into her old white dress which had been washed and ironed that week with the most painstaking care, fastened a white rose in her hair, and

came down to the sitting room to wait with her mother until Mrs. McEllman should come.

"You look very sweet this evening, Lu," her mother looked up wistfully from the couch as the girl entered. "I am so sorry that you have had to stay home all the year and cannot be with the others to-night. God will reward you, dear, for mother never could have gotten along without you. You will be glad some day you did it."

"I am glad now, mother. I am glad that I could help you," Lu answered, bending low over her and patting the thin cheek. "And I don't mind it so very much—not like I thought. And you're looking lots stronger, and with more color in your face. When Ned comes home and wakens things up with his cheery whistle, you'll be better."

"Yes, I feel I shall be better—soon. Will you have time to sing, Lu, before you go? Just one song—one I love best—'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'"

Obediently Lu sat down at the old piano. Outside the steady hum of insect life broke the stillness of the evening. The air which stirred the white curtain and rustled the leaves of the crimson rambler, growing close by the south window, was laden with the fragrance of roses and June flowers. Through the little west window the long rays of the low-descending sun shone with soft radiance and touched caressingly the worn features of the invalid as she lay listening in quiet content. Softly Lu began, then strong and clear her tones swelled out on the

chorus. Again softly, sweetly, full of assurance and faith, came the words of the second verse:

“‘I know His promise never faileth,  
The word He speaks, it cannot die;  
Though cruel death my flesh assaileth,  
Yet I shall see Him by and by.’”

Restfully the mother's eyes closed in sleep, reverently now the sunbeams kissed her cheek, a smile broke over her white features, a quiet peace pervaded the room. And wrapped in that peace Lu sang on:

“‘I know His promise never faileth,  
That where He is there I may be;  
O wondrous thought, for me He careth,  
And He at last will come for me.

“‘I know, I *know* that Jesus liveth,  
And on——”’

An exclamation from the doorway, a quick step on the floor, brought the song to a sudden stop, and Lu whirled about on the stool to see Billy striding across the room towards her mother's couch, a startled look on his face. Her eyes followed the direction of his and she sprang up with a sharp cry.

Billy stopped and placed his hand upon her arm. “Bring me a glass of water quickly,” he said. The steadiness of his tone and manner calmed her and she obeyed him without a word. Returning, they worked together silently over the still form. In a moment more Mrs. McEllman entered, and the doctor was sent for. But the silent messenger had come and as silently borne the gentle mother spirit away.

In a little while, at a signal from Mrs. McEllman,

Billy ceased his efforts, and turning to the girl, with gentle insistence took her from the room.

"It is all over, Lu," he said, compassionately. "There is nothing more we can do now. You may depend on me for anything you wish done. Leave it all to me."

In the trying hours that followed Lu wondered more than once what she would have done without his constant help. It was Billy alone who was able to quiet the little sister when she was brought home from the church where she had been helping decorate it for the evening. It was he who sent the telegram to Ned which brought him and Mrs. Clayton and Mamie hurrying home the following day by the first train. It was he who looked after the hundred and one things that need attention at such a time, and nothing was forgotten or left undone. It was he, also, after all had been done that could be for the day, who went back with Lu into that quiet room to look again upon the still face. As they stood looking down at the peace written there, faintly from across the way came the strains of the closing chorus of the exercises at the church.

Lu looked up then into the strong face, so full of feeling, near her.

"And this was to have been my commencement day," she murmured brokenly.

"Instead, it is commencement day for your mother in paradise," he answered assuringly. "Think what it means to her, and try to be brave and glad for her sake."





"The evening after their departure Ned and Lu sat down to their lonely supper table to make a pretense of eating."  
(See page 348.)



## CHAPTER 33

## THE PATH OF HIS CHOOSING

"My Master's work would not be done  
Should my hand slack, or fail my feet  
Love's call to heed, his errands run;  
Or should I halt with message sweet  
To hungering hearts and souls downcast,  
Their wounds to stanch, their ills to mend,  
Nor drop Love's blessings sure and fast  
And be to them who need, a friend."

NED and Lu, with Billy's sanction, had decided it would not be wise to send a cablegram of the news of their mother's death to Janey and Robert, since they had little means with which to send any word beyond the mere statement, and unaccompanied with some of the particulars would be more of a shock and cause for continued anxiety than otherwise. So Lu wrote the full account in a long letter to them the day following the funeral, and weeks later in their far-away tropical island home a brave little missionary heart read it, amid tears and broken sobs.

"It is not unexpected, yet it has come sooner than I thought," she said at last, growing calmer, as Robert gently and with tender words sought to comfort and console her. "But I thought, Robert, when I left, that I never should see my mother again. I somehow seemed to feel when I kissed her good-by that she would not live till our return."

"Yet in the face of that premonition you came without faltering. You never told me this before, Janey."

"No. Why should I? There was a possibility of my being mistaken in the feeling, and it was not necessary for me to trouble you with it when you were carrying so many responsibilities."

He smoothed back her brown hair with a reverent caress. "No man," he said earnestly, yet a trifle brokenly, "was ever blessed with a better, truer help-mate than I. You always carry your full share of the burden as well as trying to help lift mine. God knows, Janey, that I never could have carried on the work of this mission field without you. I can but marvel at your faith and willing sacrifice."

She shook her head slowly and smiled back at his tender gaze.

"But you have always smoothed the way and made it easier for me," she answered softly, "so that never for a moment have I wished to turn back; though just now, I should like to be back home for a little while to help Lu and Ned and to comfort Madeline. She will be heartbroken, poor child! I wonder," she added, thoughtfully, "what they will do with the home. Lu says they have not had time to think yet."

"The cottage undoubtedly needs repairs badly by this time," her husband answered, "and I don't see how they can afford to keep it and fix it up, nor do I know just what they can do without it."

"Oh, Robert, I do hope they won't want to sell it. I can't bear the thought, for no other place can ever



seem the same to me. But I suppose Lu will want to begin school again, and Ned go back to Graceland, so they will have to break up housekeeping. Poor little Madeline! What will she do? Only I know Lu will do everything for her she can."

"If I only had the money," Robert said, with a compassionate look at his wife's troubled countenance, "I'd send word at once that I would purchase it, and then the girls and Ned could live there just the same as they have always done, if they wished."

"But you haven't, and there's no use of our talking about it," said Janey. "Never mind, Robert, some way will be provided for them and for us when we get back. Our work for the present is here, and that which we cannot do we must trust to Him. Surely the Lord, who has been so good to our parents and never failed them in all they went through, will take care of us and our loved ones in every time of need."

"We have indeed been blessed since our coming here," he answered, earnestly. "How many times, Janey, has he helped us out of our difficulties! How many times we can remember when he has manifested his power on the great waters for our sakes! How often has he listened to our prayers, and how the people have been blessed through our humble efforts! Janey, dear, a long time ago I considered it a terrible sacrifice, as you know, to leave other things and take up this work. I considered I had had a pretty hard time in one way and another. I rebelled, I all but refused to accept the work the Master prompted me to do. When I finally gave up the

things I wanted so much, it seemed to me they were the most important things in the world. To-day I am beginning to realize that all which I thought I had lost is restored to me. I gave up my boyish ambition for an education, but I have since found the gospel to be the greatest educator in the world, and there can be no teacher like the Great Teacher. I don't mean to say, either, that one shouldn't get all he can from school and college. I think one should seek learning in every field of opportunity that is open to him; but if that particular field is denied him, and he but wills to make himself a student under any circumstances, there is an educational power in the gospel which is unsurpassed. Nevertheless, one must study, and continually study, if he would make himself 'approved, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,' and in his studies and research he must follow the leadings and promptings of the Spirit. God's ministers, given the privilege of receiving the highest instruction from the divine Teacher himself, ought to be the most conscientious pupils, the most thorough students, and the greatest living examples of his teachings. In so far as we fail in this we are living beneath our privileges and opportunities, and no minister of the gospel, having such access to that great source of light and knowledge, need ever say that he has not an opportunity for obtaining knowledge."

There was a short pause, during which the husband and wife sat silently, with clasped hands, watching the light rippling of the waves of the lit-

tle lagoon over the sands at their feet; then the young man resumed:

"To-day, Janey, I am glad to say, that save for your sake, and the feeling that often you have too many hardships to bear, I have no regrets. I would not go back and choose the other course if I could, for like my mother, I am ready to declare that the gospel is the most wonderful, and most marvelous thing in the world; and I feel there is no work so important for anyone as the work to which He calls; no path so pleasant as the one of His choosing."

"I count it even so," she responded, steadily, lifting her eyes to meet his. "I sense more fully than ever the meaning of the hymn which voices the thought, In His service pain is pleasure, with His favor loss is gain."

And so, by and by, when the first shock of her grief had passed away and the calmness of resignation had come, they went back up the slope to the mission house with hearts still set to do his will, with souls still attuned to that high purpose, "Love's call to heed," and to carry their "message sweet to hungering hearts and souls downcast."

The summer was one of unusual events, and changes came rapidly to the families with which we are most interested. A few weeks following Mrs. Warren's death Billy was suddenly called home by the illness of his mother, and though she was some better after he reached home, her recovery was slow. Shortly after his arrival, Mr. Gibson fell from the barn loft down the ladder and badly injured his

shoulder. This occurring just at the beginning of harvest and promising serious complications, the young man was obliged to stay and look after the fields and superintend the work of the big ranch which Nelse was not yet old enough to take charge of. The work on the place and the anxiety in the home required all the strength of his vigorous young manhood, so he had little time or thought for other things.

Elder Clayton, whose mission was still in the West, the field now extending through Oregon and Northern California, was writing urgent letters to his wife and daughter to come out and spend the year with him. These appeals began to have more weight when he finally wrote a hurried note to Mamie, telling of a position he could obtain for her as book-keeper and stenographer with a good firm in one of the enterprising western cities; for in addition to the music she had taken in Graceland during the past two years, she had also been able to graduate in the commercial course. The position open, he told her, was with good pay, and at such reasonable hours as would enable her to continue her study of music in the evenings. The prospect looked inviting, with a change of climate, new scenes in the garden spot of the West, and the opportunity for the two to be with the husband and father much of the year.

"I believe it will be worth our while, mamma, even if it does take a large share of my salary for the year to meet our expenses going out and returning," Mamie declared that evening as they discussed it pro



and con. "It will be such a good chance for us to see a little bit of the world, and then, too, papa's not as well and as strong as he used to be, and I think we ought to go if we can, for his sake. He's been away from home for many years and he's tired of it."

They were not long in making a decision, but it was Ned and Lu and Madeline who received the tidings of the proposed change with dismay.

"You just must not go," Lu declared, vehemently. "Why, we can't get along without you."

"And you won't ever come back—a year is just never ending," sighed Madeline, giving a slight cough and leaning a very pale little face against Mrs. Clayton's arm. "We won't have no mother at all when you go."

Mrs. Clayton looked down with tender pity at the girl and pressed her close, without replying. Ned gave a quick glance at Mamie, then turned suddenly on his heel and walked away. And somehow none of them had the heart to say anything more about it just then. However, as the circumstances developed in the next day or two, their opportunity to go and final decision seemed providential.

Ned found work for the summer in one of the stores down town. The hours after work he spent till late in the evening repairing the cottage, for he and Lu had decided to rent it that fall when he was ready to go back to Graceland. It would probably be late in November before he could go, and Lu and Madeline would then stay the rest of the winter in the home of Sam and Sarah Gates, where Lu would

work for her board, and the rent would largely pay for Madeline's. Lu felt sure she could review and finish her school work, and get her credits in a little more than one semester, thus graduating the following spring.

All these plans were suddenly upset in a most unexpected way. Madeline, frail from babyhood, had seemed to get more and more listless during the past few months. Wrapped in anxiety for her mother as Lu had been, she had failed to note with any concern the slight cough of the little sister which had begun in the winter and which had thus far defied all remedies. School work had seemed unusually trying on the girl during the spring, and with the sudden shock of her mother's death she began to rapidly lose energy and vitality. So languidly did she move about that Lu became alarmed; the cough, too, continued to be obstinate, and she took her to the doctor for examination. The result of Lu's interview with him afterward sent her home with a white face and a heart full of fear.

Leaving Madeline resting, after their walk home, in the hammock under the cool shadow of the trees, Lu searched for Ned without delay and found him in the garden hoeing the watermelons.

"The doctor says Madeline's cough is not to be trifled with, Ned," she said abruptly, and going straight to the point. "And he thinks it is necessary for her to have a change of climate right away. You know that time she had pneumonia the winter Janey was in Dakota? It seems it left her lungs

weak, and he says she is in danger unless we can get her away, and that she must go before winter."

Ned leaned on his hoe and looked at his sister with a shocked expression on his face. "Take her away, Lu? And what have we to take her away with? It means money, and we are in debt now."

"I'm only telling you what the doctor says," said Lu, disconsolately. "As to the wherewithal, that part looks as impossible as if we were going to send her to the moon."

"But if it takes that to save her, we must do it," said Ned, decidedly, and looking thoughtful. "We must make any sacrifice for that, Lu."

"So I am aware. But how? I'll admit if there's a way we must and will. Now in mother's case I saw the way, though it didn't seem to avail much after all, but this—" Lu's voice broke, the tears welling up into her eyes. "I can't see how we can make money enough to pay her fare, to say nothing of finding a place for her to stay where she would be cared for; besides, we could not send her alone."

They sat down in the corner of the garden under the old cherry tree, the brother and sister, and discussed the matter for a long time. And though neither spoke of it, each thought with a pang of the little family council of five which the mother had so many times called together in the old days when perplexing questions confronted them. How sadly and quickly had their numbers diminished, and they two alone must meet the issue, for Madeline could not be admitted this time.

The longer they talked, the more difficult seemed the proposition; the more they discussed, the darker the future looked, and the less probability of their finding a way in which to give their little sister the care she needed. An hour or more passed by and both were almost distracted when the gate latch clicked and a girlish voice called:

"Well, here you are. I've found you at last! Aren't you 'at home' to callers? I found Madeline asleep in the hammock and no other sign of life anywhere around. I thought you'd soon be back, so I found a pillow, curled up in the lawn chair, and dozed off to sleep to be awakened by a flock of noisy blackbirds. You look as solemn as owls. What's the matter?" And Mamie, in fresh white dimity, and smiling face quite in contrast to theirs, dropped down beside them on the grass. Ned's face lighted up and Lu's looked her thankfulness for the interruption.

"You float in upon us like some bright angel, Mamie," Lu declared. "I hope you'll be as resourceful as tradition tells us they are. Ned and I have reached our limit, it seems. Tell her, Ned."

"You tell her," insisted her brother.

Mamie's face grew instantly serious as Lu began, and leaning her chin upon one hand, and the elbow resting on her knee, she silently listened and grew thoughtful.

"The simplest thing in the world," she said when Lu had finished and they were all silent for a moment. "I wonder you did not think of it. Let Made-



line go with mamma and me. I'm sure mamma would be glad to have her with us. And you know papa has written that one of the brethren out there is going to let us have his cottage up in the mountains for a while this fall. Nothing could be better for her, and papa says it's so beautiful there that I'm sure she can't get lonesome. You know I do not take my position until the first of September, so I'll be up there with them a little while."

Lu and Ned looked at each other, hope dawning in their eyes.

"I can get the grammar department in the school here, I believe," Ned said. "The place is still open, and by taking it I can easily pay her fare and expenses."

"And I can stay at home and cook this year as I did last," said Lu. "I can keep up all the household expenses that way, so we can have all yours to spend for her and to pay up some of the little debts we owe."

"It must be done," Ned said, with quick decision. "It's wonderfully good of you, Mamie," he added, gratefully, "to offer to take her, but I am afraid it will be too much of a burden for your mother."

"I'm sure mamma won't think so at all," said Mamie, "but just to prove it I'll ask her at once and let you know."

"And I'll see about the school," said Ned.

"And I'll tell Madeline," said Lu, "and see if she's willing to go."

In a few days arrangements were thus satisfac-

torily settled. In no other way would Madeline have consented to go so far away from Ned and Lu, though she was eager for the trip. Things were made ready in a hurry. Lu stitched away almost day and night, getting new clothes made and old ones fixed over for the sister, and in less than two weeks everything was done, the necessary money borrowed, tickets bought, and Mrs. Clayton, Mamie, and Madeline were journeying on their westward way over the mountains.

The evening after their departure Ned and Lu sat down to their lonely supper table to make a pretense of eating. Lu's face had grown thin with the months of care and anxiety for her mother, and her bereavement, and the subsequent worry over the younger sister. As she poured for her brother the cup of barley and passed it to him, she tried to jest lightly, but her laugh sounded hollow in the quiet little kitchen. His attempts at conversation were equally as unsuccessful and they soon both relapsed into silence. The little clock on the shelf valiantly did its part to break the stillness, and louder and louder seemed to tick as the moments passed. At last Ned pushed back from the table.

"It's no use trying to eat supper this evening, Lu," he said with a half choke in his voice. "I know you've fixed everything just as nice and tasty as you always do, but it simply won't slide down. Leave the dishes and let's go over to Sam's and Sarah's for a while."

Lu obeyed willingly, and with a feeling of relief.

It was late when they came back home again. By the window in her own little room before retiring, the girl offered but one short, simple petition that night.

"Dear Lord," she whispered, "I'm stronger and better able to bear these hard things than the others. Lift, then, so far as possible, the burdens and sorrows from their shoulders, and let the heaviest part rest upon me."

## CHAPTER 34

## "A MERE MATTER OF SENTIMENT"

THE IMMEDIATE weeks which followed were trying ones to the two young people, left behind to adjust themselves to a new situation, to work out the new problems it involved, and to face many lonely hours. Ned for a time seemed to have entirely lost his old cheeriness, and all Lu's efforts to brighten his evenings and the few moments during the day when he was at home were of little avail. He came and went silently, with a preoccupied manner, was almost cross at times, and when September came, took up his school work with a dogged air of indifference. He was so unlike himself that Lu began to wonder, as she performed the ceaseless round of daily tasks, if she, too, were growing morose and fretful.

"I believe I'm staying too close to my work," she reflected one afternoon. "I begin to feel so cross and irritable myself that it's no wonder Ned can't keep cheerful. S'pose he feels something the same way, and my gloomy countenance isn't very inspiring. Guess I'll leave my work a little while this afternoon and run over to Dora's and brighten up a bit."

It was an inviting world outside—a sunny October day and the maples were flashing their gleaming robes conspicuously amid the reds and browns of their neighboring oaks. Just as Lu stepped out on



the porch and paused to fasten the door, Dora herself came hurrying down the street and in at the front gate.

"Oh, Lu," she panted, breathless with excitement, "I've just learned the greatest news! Guess what?"

"Impossible," declared Lu. "My brain is too dulled with the sordid things of life. It must be startling, so don't keep me guessing."

"Startling all right," replied Dora, sitting down on the top porch step. "Please let me get my breath first—it's about Billy and—Meta——"

"Billy and Meta!" exclaimed Lu, her hand on the door knob, a sudden premonition bringing a sharpness to her tone as she asked, "What do you mean?"

"I mean to say they're engaged. Isn't it great? I always thought Billy liked Meta, but I never dreamed they'd decide matters so quickly. Of course I suppose her being up there all summer with her aunt—her ranch adjoins Mr. Gibson's, you know—they've been together a good deal. Meta always did think Billy was the sum total of all excellence——"

"How did you hear it?" asked Lu, fingering the key and looking down at Dora, whose face was flushed with gratified excitement at being the first to tell the news.

"Oh, I just got a little note from her telling about her new ring and how happy she was. 'Guess who?' she added at the end. As if I couldn't do that easy when she's been writing about her rides and good times with Billy all summer. You know he was quite attentive to her last winter and spring."

"Yes-s," assented Lu, slowly, a heavy weight seeming suddenly to oppress her.

"Isn't it the loveliest thing you ever heard?" declared Dora, romantically, all unconscious of the tumult she was stirring in Lu's heart. "Meta's never had very much, and how she will enjoy Billy's money! She dearly loves fine things."

"I suppose so," Lu answered, "but I hope I—I hope she—hasn't thought of it from that standpoint, though such things do appeal to her."

"Well, I wonder who of us they don't appeal to," laughed Dora. "You know yourself that if a fellow had plenty of money and you knew he was generous and could give you a home it would count in your eyes a good deal more than if he hadn't anything. Now be honest, Lu."

"I know he wouldn't," Lu flashed back, indignantly. "I wouldn't give a fig for the money part if he didn't amount to something without it."

"Oh, of course we would all want him to be up to the standard in manners and goodness," Dora qualified, "but just the same, the other counts with most girls, and you are very unlike the rest of us if it doesn't count with you, too."

"Then I'm unlike," retorted Lu sharply, "and I hope Meta is. I hope if she—if she marries—Billy, she'll like him regardless of other considerations. He's more deserving than that."

Dora laughed again. "He's a good fellow all right," she replied, "but he wouldn't be half so desirable if



“‘What’s brought you home this time of the morning?’ she asks. . . . ‘I thought you were going to be unusually busy to-day.’” (See page 377.)





he were poor. Meta thinks that way, too, for she said as much to me one time."

"I say if she really cared for him she wouldn't even think of that," averred the other, stoutly.

"You always were an idealist, Lu, in spite of your protests to the contrary. For a girl who makes the claim to be practical, you have a lot of very fine-spun theories. Meta's a good girl all right and she'll make Billy a good wife, and he'll never know the difference if she does care for his money. Come to think of it now," she added, "you ought to have married him yourself; then, of course it would have been necessary to have some splendid test to prove to him you really loved him and not his money, just like it is in stories."

Lu's face flushed and her lips closed tightly.

"Quite romantic," she remarked, dryly, "but since I'm not given to romance, I greatly fear the test would fail. Suppose you come in. There's a comfortable rocker in the house."

"Gracious, no!" Dora answered, springing up with sudden remembrance. "Mother's gone down town. She left the baby with me and told me not to leave him a minute, but when I got the letter I just couldn't wait till she got back, to tell some one. You were the nearest, and I knew you'd be just crazy to know. Can't you come back with me? I really must go. Mother would be horrified if she knew I'd left Jacky this way."

"I have some baking I must get done."

"But I thought you were leaving just now?"

"So I was," Lu replied, "but I happen to remember I promised Mrs. Gates to bake a cake for her supper. I think I'd better do it first. Maybe I can run over later on."

"All right, then. I must be going. Do come." And Dora hastened away down the leaf-strewn path, while Lu as hastily entered the house and closed the door.

"It's fortunate to be able to make one's memory serve just when you need it most," she said to herself a little grimly. "Anyhow I didn't story to Dora, though I intended to bake the cake when I got back, but—but—I didn't know I cared like this. I understand now why Billy hasn't written for nearly three weeks. Strange how people forget their friends when they're having a good time themselves. I wonder why—"

She broke off suddenly with an air of grim determination, walked straight to the mirror in the corner, and placing her elbows on the little shelf rested her chin in her hands and gazed severely at her own reflection.

"Lu Warren," she began, with all the sternness and solemnity of a judge pronouncing a sentence, "you are a silly dunce. You've done a good many foolish things, but I declare I never thought this of you. Sentiment! Bah! Now you know well enough you don't care one single mite for Billy Gibson. Of course you don't. Do you understand? It's perfect nonsense, you who pride yourself on having just plain common sense. Of course Billy's good as gold.

There's not another like him in the world—but what do you care, and you ought to be glad Meta does. Maybe she does care for him instead of his money (only you know she doesn't) but that's no difference to you. You ought to be spending your time in thanksgiving that Madeline is getting better, and that if she continues to improve as fast as she has done since she went West, she can come back next spring. You are very ungrateful and silly. Now you walk straight into the kitchen and set yourself to work making that cake for Mrs. Gates, and don't you let me hear another word out of you—for if you dare to let a mere matter of sentiment trouble you I'll—"

But this unspoken threat failed somehow to alarm the girl in the mirror. Strange to say, instead of obeying the stern commands of her dictator, she went in exactly the opposite direction and did exactly the opposite thing she had been told. She went—but there, how can I tell you just where she went or what she did, for the front window blind was drawn, and the door was locked. I can only tell you that the customer who called that afternoon for a loaf of bread received no response to his knock, and that the cake for Mrs. Gates was not ready until late in the afternoon. Just before the time for Ned to come home the blind was mysteriously raised and the door unlocked, and when he entered there seemed nothing unusual in Lu's manner as she bustled to and from the kitchen and pantry, and from pantry to cook stove.

Even if there had been anything unusual about

the state of affairs at home that evening, Ned was entirely too absent-minded to notice it. Yet for some reason his mood had changed and he was in most excellent spirits. The shadow that had hovered over him for weeks had disappeared, and it seemed to his sister he had never been more inclined to play jokes and to jest. His laugh resounded gayly and his cheery whistle floated tantalizingly back to her from the barnyard whither he had betaken himself to do the chores, after teasing her, the cat, the dog, and anything else that came in his way.

As the evening passed and this jocular mood continued, she wondered. She wondered still more the next day when his good spirits fairly bubbled over. The moroseness which had possessed him for many days had disappeared as suddenly as her own heart heaviness had come. Twice she approached him to tell him of Billy's and Meta's engagement, but went back to her work without having done so. The following noon he came in from school more quietly. As she busied herself putting away the weekly washing she caught his low whistle in the room downstairs, and then heard him ascending the stairs three steps at a time and go to his room. She placed the clean aprons and waists in her dresser, and taking the freshly ironed shirts and handkerchiefs of her brother, went into the hall. As she touched the door-knob and stepped rather abruptly into his room he turned with a quick start and hastily shoved something into the top drawer of his desk.



"Hello, sis!" he said lightly, and with an evident attempt to look unconcerned.

"Here are your clean clothes," Lu answered. "What's the matter with you, Ned? You look like a youngster caught stealing jam," she said, suspiciously. "Don't tell me you haven't had something mysterious up your sleeve these last two or three days."

"Ah, come off, sis," he answered, thrusting his hands in his pockets and striding around the small room in an attempt to appear indifferent.

"You can't fool me," said Lu, giving him a straight look. "The evidence is against you, Ned. 'Fess up. What is it?"

Ned stopped in his walk and looked at his sister. "Guess I might as well, Lu, seeing as how you 'most caught me. Besides, I'm just about ready to explode with the secret anyhow. Come over here."

He took her by the arm and led her to his desk in the corner of the room and pulled open the drawer he had so hastily closed a moment before. "There 'tis," he said, awkwardly. "That's my secret."

Lu's eyes fell upon a tiny box in the corner. "Oh, is it Mamie, Ned?" she asked with sudden comprehension, opening it and looking at the slender band of gold, whose single gem reflected the sunlight in flashing gleams.

He nodded, his eyes shining.

"Oh, Ned, I'm so glad, and so surprised. I—I rather thought you and Mamie were not—so friendly as you used to be."

"Well, we did have a sort of a quarrel some time ago—and—oh, I don't know, the fact was I got tired of it, so I pocketed my pride a week or two ago and wrote her a long letter. I got her answer day before yesterday. She's sure a wonder, Lu, and I'm the most fortunate fellow on earth," he declared, jubilantly. "Why don't you congratulate your brother?"

Lu smiled indulgently. "Do give me time. I'm surely glad. You know that, and you know, too, there's no girl in the world I'd rather have for a sister than Mamie. You're not half good enough for her, even if you are my brother."

"I know it," Ned replied, his eyes glowing. "That's what makes me wonder about it so. You'll never know what such a symbol as that means, sis, till you have a like experience," he added.

"Oh, perhaps not," Lu replied quickly, hastily placing the circlet back in the box and turning away. "I'm not much for sentiment anyhow, as you know; but dinner's ready, Ned, and getting cold. Your favorite pudding is in the warming oven and I hope you'll enjoy it in spite of letters and rings and the best girl in the world. I'm ravenously hungry myself and you can tell me the rest of the story while we eat."

## CHAPTER 35

## THE CREMATION OF CLEOPATRA

CLEOPATRA, of all exasperating fowls you are the worst!" Lu stepped out on the back porch one morning a few days later to empty a pan of parings and paused in astonishment as her pet hen walked sedately toward her, followed by a small brood of wobbly chickens.

"So that's what you've been doing," she commented, as the hen looked up at her pertly. "Stealing your nest out and here in October coming in with a nice little bunch for me to take care of during the cold weather. You don't deserve a penny's worth of grain this winter for playing such a trick."

The old hen clucked contentedly, quite unmindful of this tirade of her mistress, and pecked at some fallen crumbs hungrily. A weak, wobbly little black chicken, left far in the rear, chirped in distress and finally managed to scramble nearer. The moment the hen caught sight of it she darted back fiercely and began pecking it cruelly on the head. Cleopatra had always had antipathy for black chickens. Though a dark Plymouth Rock herself, she would not tolerate color, and showed her resentment of it in her offspring by promptly dispensing with them at the earliest moment.

"Cleopatra, you wicked hen!" cried the girl. "I'll forgive you for bringing me your brood to take care

of, but if you ever kill another chicken you'll suffer for it."

The hen showed her disdain for this threat by making a vicious peck, then grabbing the unfortunate black chick by the top of the head and giving it a fling to one side—dead.

"Wretched thing!" exclaimed the indignant girl, catching up a stick of wood and throwing it at her. For once Lu's aim unexpectedly went straight to the mark. The stick of wood whizzed through the air angrily, striking the hen on the neck, dislocating it, and she tumbled over.

"There, I've done it, sure enough," said the girl, repentantly. "Well, she deserved it, though I didn't mean to kill her. Poor thing!" The chickens were cheeping dismally about. "Dead all right, and left a bunch of orphans to my care. Always the inconsiderate Cleopatra. Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good! I've been wondering what we'd have for dinner. Ned will be surprised to find Cleopatra in the kettle. Chicken and dumplings will be an agreeable change from the quickly prepared lunches I've been giving him of late. I'd better put the water on to heat at once. I say it's none too early to start cooking. A five-year-old hen will need plenty of time."

Such was the tragic end of the hen which had been a dooryard pet and pest for a number of years. Lu gathered the frightened little brood into a basket, wrapped them comfortably and put them in a warm corner of the kitchen. A half hour before noon she



lifted the lid and looked dubiously into the kettle, thrust her fork in here and there, and shook her head.

"Just as contrary as ever," she declared. "Tough as leather. But I'll make the dumplings anyhow, and the gravy will be good. I declare to goodness, Cleopatra, we'll eat you if I have to cook you another half day."

Just as she had dropped the last dumpling in the kettle and covered it with the lid, a loud ringing sounded from the front door. "A customer, and just at the wrong time, of course," she said, hurriedly. "But these will be all right for a few moments, though I'm afraid I haven't put in enough water."

Again the bell rang urgently, and Lu hurried into the other room. The day was warm and the inside door stood ajar. She pushed the screen open, but there was no one in sight.

"That tease of a brother! He must have closed school early," the girl said aloud. "He's probably around the corner. Well, I haven't time to stop and hunt for him now," she concluded, turning back.

Somebody stepped quickly from behind the door. One arm caught and held her, and a hand covered her eyes.

"Mercy, Ned, how you startled—"

The sentence was not completed, for Lu became suddenly conscious that the arm that held her fast, the hand over her eyes were not Ned's, yet she dared

not guess. She waited in the profound silence that followed, her heart beating tumultuously.

"Dinner is nearly ready," she said at last, casting about for something to say. "I must hurry to the kitchen or it will all be spoiled."

No answer.

"Honestly, I just put a cake in the oven—if you want a piece—"

Still no answer.

"And the dumplings will get all soggy."

Evidently there was to be no relenting.

"Well, then," Lu at last ventured desperately, "perhaps you'd like me to tell you that Billy Gibson has returned from Dakota and will probably invite himself to call——"

"Good guesser," came the quick response, accompanied by a jolly laugh as the hand was removed from her eyes and he stooped to kiss her before there was time for protest.

"My eyes! Lu, but it's good to see you again. Seems to me I've been gone for ages. Never knew so many delays to occur in my life, and after I got started a freight train wreck ahead of us yesterday held us up for three hours till I was on the verge of distraction. Do say you're glad to see me and say it quick. I vowed if I ever got back to Banforth, I'd never leave the place again unless you'd go with me, Lu. You will, won't you? Why don't you answer?"

"You haven't given me time yet?" answered the

girl, half bewildered at Billy's whirlwind statements and questions, "Besides—"

"Besides what?"

"If you were so dreadfully anxious you might have written, at least, and explained—some things—"

"So I might, and so I would have done, but for two weeks I've been held back a day at a time, expecting sure to start the following one. Dad wasn't so well, and each morning he kept begging me to stay one day longer, so I didn't have the heart to leave him till Sally and her husband came to take care of the ranch, and then at the very last minute, a few days ago that pesky little Meta Benders sat her foot down and declared I had to stay to her wedding. Said I'd been the one to get her and her dear Peter acquainted and no one else should perform the ceremony. I consented at last, if they'd promise to hurry it forward, and they did—no doubt more glad of the excuse than of the fact that I was there."

"And who's Peter?" asked Lu, suddenly dimpling into smiles and sensing a comfortable feeling that the world and its affairs had all at once been properly righted.

"Oh, Peter's a red-headed duffer—Irish in wit, name, and face. They fell madly in love at the first in spite of Meta's oft-avowed preference to black hair and dark eyes. Peter's freckles are more precious to her now than rubies. Good fellow he is, too, and I'm rather proud to think I had a hand in the match. He adores her and is as kind-hearted a chap as ever lived."

"I'm so glad for Meta," said Lu, looking down demurely. "I—I heard she was engaged."

"Yes, they were not long in deciding matters, but I'm not particularly interested in their affairs just now. Will you please to remember that you haven't answered my question yet?"

"Have you heard about Ned and Mamie?"

"Ned and Mamie? You don't mean——"

"Ned sent her the ring a few days ago."

"Jolly, that's great! I'm glad to hear it. But Lu——"

The door between the living room and kitchen was closed, but at this moment from the whereabouts of the kitchen stove came ominous sounds, while sundry odors of burning viands penetrated at last.

"My goodness, Billy, Cleopatra's burning up!" Lu exclaimed, tearing herself from his grasp and flying towards the kitchen.

"Cleopatra what?" cried Billy, dashing after her, not an idea as to what was happening. A cloud of smoke and unpleasant odors of burning things greeted them as they opened the door into the kitchen and a sight met their eyes. The fire under the kettle had blazed up and set the contents boiling rapidly, the steam and puffy dumplings had lifted the lid, and the top of the stove was one splatter of smoking soup and dumplings.

Lu ran for a holder and set the kettle out on the stove. Then she lifted the lid and peered in. What was left within had stuck to the sides and bottom of



the kettle and was burning black. Billy looked over her shoulder.

"Cleopatra has all burned up," she remarked, regretfully. "She had her revenge after all. That bird always did get the best of me anyhow."

"Evidently there's not much best left."

"An eventful life," soliloquized the girl, "and forever unfortunate. Twice she fell into the swill pail and was rescued just before the last struggle. Once she got stepped on by a horse and her leg broken. Another time she was nearly drowned in a rainstorm and was resuscitated only after much effort. Madeline forgot her and left her outside the henhouse one cold winter night and her comb froze off. Her death has been no less tragic. To-day when she killed one of her innocent chicks I flung a stick of wood at her and inadvertently broke her neck. Therefore she was consigned to the kettle. In my vengeance, however, I had no intention of cremating her."

"You don't mean to tell me you made as straight a throw as that?"

"There's the evidence," she replied, pointing to the still smoking kettle, and flying around to raise the windows, and open wide the door.

"And here's the evidence of a time when you missed the mark," Billy said, pulling at something in his overcoat pocket. "Now I come to think of it, Lu, I don't know but your aim was better than it seemed at the time." And he brought forth an old and battered horseshoe.

"Have you got that ridiculous horseshoe yet?" cried Lu in amazement.

"Sure I have," responded the young man, holding it up. "Tons couldn't separate me from that and the luck it symbolizes. And by the way, Lu," taking a dilapidated looking article from another pocket, "can you tell me where the Cinderella is that lost this? The prince is looking for the girl who has its mate."

"Mrs. Clayton's old slipper that I lost at the camp!" exclaimed the girl in still greater astonishment. "Billy Gibson, I hunted those grounds over for that shoe. How did you get it?"

"Never mind how. I found it and have kept it in a safe place. Where's the other one?"

"Such a mess as this is," turning her attention again to the smoking stove. "However will we get it cleaned up?"

"I might help you out of the difficulty if you'd promise me the other shoe. Don't you think it's nearly time for Ned to come home," Billy suggested with subtle strategy, looking at the clock.

Lu started. "I'll find it, Billy, if you'll help me to get things straightened up and this stuff disposed of before Ned comes. He's such a tease! We'll never hear the last of it if he finds it out."

"Peace to the ashes of Cleopatra!" shouted Billy, triumphantly, swinging the kettle from the stove with a grand flourish. "She's done me one good turn anyhow, for which I bless her memory."

## CHAPTER 36

## THE RICHER MEED

NOTWITHSTANDING the menu was minus chicken and dumplings that day, it was a gay little meal, the first jolly one in the brown cottage for many months. Billy and Lu were more than content with bread and butter, jam, and a few warmed over potatoes, and Ned, blissfully ignorant of Cleopatra's sudden demise, was totally unaware of any loss.

"Let's take a walk," Billy suggested when Ned had gone back to school and the two were finishing up the dishes. "You look as though you needed an outing, Lu. What have you been doing with yourself, anyhow? Staying cooped up and cooking all the time?" he asked, as he wiped the last utensil and tossed the dishtowel at her.

"Mostly," she replied, dodging and catching it dexterously with one hand. "People are too hungry to allow me much time for any runs out in the fresh air. I really don't believe I can go this afternoon. I've a lot of baking promised for this evening."

"Let 'em starve," said Billy, cheerfully. "They'll have to learn to get along without you in a little while anyway, and it will do 'em good to begin by degrees. Come on."

Lu gave one glance out of the window at the mel-low October sunlight dancing through the bright

leaves. "I've been wanting some nuts," she agreed, "and to go down to the glen before the leaves are all gone. Maybe there are a few walnuts and hickory nuts left yet."

The glen was a bower of color and autumnal beauty that afternoon, with its mingled browns and reds and gold and softly variegated hues. The grass was still green and the mossy banks were strewn with a light covering of leaves which shifted about and rustled softly before each passing breeze. Lu, searching about among them for the coveted nuts, had relapsed into an unusual silence and was answering Billy's chatter in monosyllables.

"What's the matter?" he queried at last, looking up at her quizzically as he stooped to pick up a stone and crack a hickory nut. "What makes you so quiet all of a sudden?"

Lu flushed and looked still more sober.

"I've just been thinking, Billy—" she began, hesitatingly.

"Well—"

"I've been wondering," she went on slowly, accepting the nuts he had cracked for her, "if after all it isn't a mistake. I'm such a numskull, I'm wondering how you ever came to care for me at all. I can't do any of the lovely things other girls can. You ought to have an accomplished wife, Billy—one who can sing, and paint, and entertain your friends better than I can ever do. I don't know how to do any of those things, for I'm just a plodder and never had time for the better things, and maybe haven't the



ability to learn if I had the opportunity. I'm not your equal, Billy."

The young man threw some empty shells from his hand against the rocky bank. The blue eyes, which had harbored a merry twinkle when she began, had changed into varying expressions as she proceeded. Impulsively now he took a step nearer, and his voice thrilled with deep earnestness as he spoke:

"Lu, don't ever speak like that again. If I were a hundred times better than I am I wouldn't be worthy of you. Let others sing and write and dream and paint, if they will—to me you are the most accomplished girl I know—and the bravest."

"Why, Billy," exclaimed the girl in wide-eyed wonder and unbelief at his words, "you know better than that, and I don't understand how you can say it. I could never do anything brave, and my tasks have been of the commonest sort, while the sum total of my accomplishments seems to be to cook, wash dishes, and mend."

"Sometimes it takes more heroism to do those things than it does to kill bears," Billy replied lightly, but nevertheless as earnestly. "And all the while," he went on, "you were only doing such simple tasks on the side as earning the bread for the family, looking after the mother, and doing the thousand and one little things most girls neglect, at the same time

keeping it a secret from the brother away at school. It reminds me, Lu, of the stanza:

“‘We call him great who does some deed  
That echo bears from shore to shore—  
Does that, and then does nothing more;  
Yet would his work earn richer meed,  
When brought before the King of kings,  
Were he but great in little things.’

When the Lord bestows his rewards, Lu, it will be rich in blessing to those who have not despised the little, unlovely tasks, nor neglected the duty that was nearest.”

. . . . .

It was a dull November afternoon a few weeks later. Lu was busy at the sewing machine stitching at some house aprons when Billy ran up the steps and burst into the room with his customary impetuosity.

“Put your work away, Lu; I’ve something very important to discuss,” he began.

“Very well,” she answered, “but wait till I finish this seam. What is it?”

“Just this,” he replied, hanging his hat on the rack, and pulling his chair near hers. “One of our wealthy patrons of the bank is ill. He has a large estate out in California, also a number of business matters that must be attended to in connection with it, and he wants our bank to look after it for him. Some one must go out there, and the trustees have decided upon me. I’m not at all averse to the trip,

provided you are willing to go along. Can you be ready by Tuesday? We could have the wedding Sunday, or Tuesday morning, if you prefer."

"Why, Billy Gibson!" she exclaimed. "How do you suppose I can get ready on a moment's notice for a wedding and a trip like that?"

"Longer than a moment—it's four days' notice," he corrected.

"I haven't any clothes fit for such a trip; besides, I told you before I didn't want to be married a day earlier than next spring. Then there's Ned—I can't leave him like that——"

"Never mind Ned. He can take care of himself—he can stay at Sam's and Sarah's for a few weeks. We'll be back in six weeks, or a couple of months at the most, just after the holidays, maybe. Really, I won't go without you. Please say you will," he urged with winning persuasiveness.

"But listen, Billy——"

"Now, Lu, it's your turn to listen to me this time. You need the trip. It will do you worlds of good, and what does it matter whether you have a lot of clothes or not? There's no good reason for your not going. You have three days in which to make a wedding dress, and you can buy your new suit and coat when we get to the city. We'll go straight to San Francisco——"

"It's impossible——"

"Then there's Madeline, you know how homesick she is getting," Billy continued evenly and with artful diplomacy, well knowing the weight any reference

to her might add to his argument. "We'll send a letter to Mrs. Clayton, and have her bring Madeline to San Francisco to meet us—we'll take a few glimpses of western mountain scenery, and spend Thanksgiving and maybe Christmas with her——"

Lu's face began to indicate signs of relenting. Her eyes were glowing with the tender light that always came with the mention of Madeline, but as she looked up she caught the jubilant expression in Billy's.

"Oh, you rogue," she answered, with a merry laugh of capitulation, "you may give all the credit for this answer to my little sister. You don't deserve any."



## CHAPTER 37

### "ERODELPHIANS"

**I**N A certain little mission house in a far-off island where the tropical sun was tempered to a degree by the soft, sweet-scented breeze, Robert Clayton bent with a mystified air over a slip of paper which had just been handed him by a messenger. This curious cablegram which had so startled him at its delivery contained but a single word, and a look of puzzled, astonished wonder swept his features as he read it.

"What is it, Robert?" his wife asked, stooping to place Baby Eleanor on the bed and hurrying anxiously to his side.

"What under the shining skies made Billy send such a cablegram as this!" he ejaculated, and Janey, looking over his shoulder, read the message, headed at Banforth, addressed to Robert, and containing the one word, "Erodelphians," signed "Billy."

"Erodelphians," repeated Robert, with dawning comprehension. "Our old athletic club name at Clifton Heights, Janey, meaning, 'We are brothers.' The first scratch of any kind he's ever sent me since you and I were married, though I wrote him twice. Evidently he has forgiven everything at last."

"Isn't that just like him?" exclaimed Janey. "Who, but Billy, would have ever thought of sending a cablegram under such circumstances?"

"Yes, once in the notion, he couldn't get the word to me quick enough," Robert said, happily. "It's as typical of him as anything he ever did. Oh, but I'm glad! He couldn't have sent me anything in the world I appreciate like that. There's been a sore place in my heart ever since the breaking of our friendship, for I surely do think a lot of Billy."

Baby Eleanor was fretting and restless. Janey went back to toss her a pretty plaything, and returning again took the slip from her husband's hand. "It fascinates me," she said with a laugh. "I somehow feel that it means even more than you think. He wouldn't have sent a cablegram just for that."

"Isn't that enough?" asked Robert with a pleased look. "I tell you, Janey, it's worth more to me than I can ever express."

His wife still studied the paper thoughtfully. "Let's see, the steamer is due this afternoon, isn't it?" she questioned. "Perhaps there will be something in the mail which will explain it more fully."

"How could there be, unless he sent the cablegram long after the letter was sent? He would hardly do that."

But the next mail did explain it in part. It brought Lu's letter, telling of her engagement to Billy.

Robert looked at his wife, as she read the news, with a flash of understanding. "If they were engaged two or three weeks ago when this letter was written," he said, "the cablegram we received this morning means they are married and Billy and I are truly 'brothers.'"

"Do you really suppose that's what it means?" she exclaimed.

"Of course it does—wait and see if the next letter does not tell us of their marriage. Well, I'm sure glad for Billy."

"I'm glad for Lu," said Janey, thoughtfully. "Since matters are settled between Ned and Mamie, I'll not worry half so much about the girls and how they are getting along at home. I always knew Lu liked him, and I thought Billy would awaken to his right senses after a while and know his own mind."

. . . . .

Looking forward into the future, years seem to stretch out endlessly; but looking backward we discover the time has been swift in its passing. Two years and more have slipped quickly by since the above message was cabled across the seas, and the time of Robert and Janey's allotted stay in a foreign land is rapidly nearing the end. Baby Eleanor is fast growing into a dark-eyed little lass, and proper opportunities for her schooling must in a year or two be taken into consideration. For her sake as well as to be again at home with friends and dear ones, they are looking forward to their return, and yet with regret because of the dear people there whom they have learned to love and must leave behind; for the responsibilities of the mission will still cling to them long after they leave the islands.

At Banforth there have been changes and some progress. The work of the church has not been neg-

lected, but has been maintained in a gradual, steady growth under the wise leadership of Elder Clayton, who returned home with his family a year ago and has since presided over the district. Having been ordained to the office of high priest and appointed as bishop of the district, Billy is energetically seconding his efforts in every way. As such bishop he is a wise and careful steward, faithful in the discharge of his duties, and conscientious and honest in all matters of business of whatever nature.

There is an unpretentious, though new and modern little house down the street not far from the brown cottage which Lu's capable hands and brains and heart have transformed into an ideal home, one of pleasing comfort, but not extravagant luxury. Ned is still away pursuing his college work, and Madeline, the bloom of health again in her cheeks, a happy, carefree school-girl, lives with her sister.

Busy at his desk in the bank late one evening, Billy reaches over and takes out a bulky envelope from one of the pigeon holes. Taking the papers out he looks at them a few seconds, a thoughtful frown on his face. As administrator of the estate which is solely comprised of the Little Brown Cottage and its yard and garden plot, he finds it necessary to make some disposition of the property. Ned has written that he is needing his share, and suggests the advisability of its sale. All are aware that it is no longer a matter of good business to hold it, standing as it is without modern equipment, badly needing repairs, and daily decreasing in value.



Billy runs his fingers through his hair, rumpling it in careless fashion while he hesitates, remembering his wife's look of distress when he had spoken to her that morning of the necessity for its sale.

"I know it's foolish to think of keeping it," she had said, "but it's so hard to think of parting with it."

Billy leans back in his chair. Again the memory of his wife's pained face as she signed the papers consenting to its sale, comes to him. A new idea flashes into his mind. "The very thing," he says, with the old impulsiveness so characteristic of him, "I'll do it."

He leans forward, takes up his pen, and writes rapidly for a few moments, then folding the papers, thrusts them into the pigeonhole and closes his desk.

It is some weeks later when he hurries home in the middle of the morning. He is in gay spirits. In the hallway he catches up Billy, junior, from the floor where he sits playing, and tosses him to his shoulder. He finds his wife busy at the kitchen sink washing up the baking dishes.

"What's brought you home this time of the morning?" she asks as the two Billies enter the kitchen. "I thought you were going to be unusually busy to-day."

"And so I am," answered Billy, senior. "But I've something to show you."

Lu lays aside her dishtowel and takes the long envelope he hands her, opening it to find—a deed to the brown cottage.

"Oh!" is all she can say at first, the smiles on her face, the glad tears in her eyes. "But can we really afford——"

"I thought," he interrupts, while Billy, junior, crows with delight and pulls at the thick mop of his father's hair, "that Robert and Janey would be home before a great while. They have little to start house-keeping with and no chance to earn money for a home. If you'll help me with the plans we might remodel and make it comfortable for them. You know Janey paid the mortgage on it several years ago, so the larger share of the estate falls to her anyway, and she and Robert have asked me to take care of her portion and invest it till they return. By adding a little we can——"

"Oh, Billy, I'm so glad, and it's so good of you ——"

As he goes whistling to his work a few minutes later Lu sits down in the middle of the kitchen floor to play with her young son and console him over his father's departure, while she wipes away the happy tears from her own eyes.

Without further delay, and full of enthusiasm, the two have set to work. The cottage has been visited many times and plans made. The old timbers are good, so the remodeling is not a difficult matter, and Lu is already planning some little homey touches for the inside. Baby Eleanor's room, for instance, which is really nothing more than a tiny alcove, is to have a little white bed and dresser and dainty curtains, two or three Dutch scenes in blue, and a

picture of the Christ child in sepia. And so the little brown cottage will soon be changed into a better and more comfortable dwelling place than ever before, and under the title of the Little Brown Bungalow will enter upon a new era of service for those who have long loved it and called it home.

There are one or two others we wish to mention. Mr. Gibson has retired from ranch life, leaving his Dakota acres in the care of his daughter Sally and his son-in-law. He and his wife, with Nelse and Pansy, have settled in Banforth, where every day he can, if he desires, limp over to his son's home and spend many hours with Billy, junior.

"I 'low," he often declares, as he trots his lusty grandson on his knee, "that that boy's the best and smartest one on airth. There ain't another like him in the whole United States, from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

As a member of the Banforth Branch Mr. Gibson stands a stalwart figure, firm and unwavering in the doctrine and faith of Christ as taught in ancient and latter times, and in his own unique way he serves as a wise adviser to the many who come to seek his counsel.

## CHAPTER 38

"HOW BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HAVE LABORED  
DILIGENTLY IN HIS VINEYARD"

I KNOW you will be asking who are these characters in my story. You may be surprised when I answer that in one sense they are typical of many. And I would assure you that you have but to look closely in order to discover, the same as I, the Roberts and Janeys, the Billies and Lus, the Neds and Mamies. "Where?" you ask with incredulity. They are all around you and may be very near you. In the schools of our land, in its colleges, in the streets, on the farms, in the cities, in the homes, possibly at your very own hearthstone. Deep thoughts may be stirring the heart of that youth who so cleverly hides his real feelings under a brusqueness of manner and carelessness of words; and serious desires and purposes often slumber beneath the mask of frivolity and gay indifference of that happy girl.

With his broad vision and his great understanding of the motives in human hearts, God is able to look beyond these outward demonstrations of frivolity and seeming indifference, beneath the merry lightness which so frequently bubbles over out of happy, growing young hearts, and looking through this he may there behold a depth of purity and beauty and coming usefulness which we with our shortsighted vision fail to perceive. And if perchance he should



sometime, in his wisdom and by his grace, permit you to stand beside him while for a moment he brushed away this outward mask from a young heart, and you looked upon it as he looks down upon it, you would see in it a likeness to some rare, white, wonderful blossom, slowly unfolding its delicate petals to the sunshine of His love, disclosing only by degrees its beauty and fragrance. As you watched this slow unfolding process, you would rejoice and marvel in its promise, and no longer wonder at the preciousness of a young soul in His sight.

God is watching over his vineyard. He has not forsaken, nor is he neglecting it. Rapidly he is hastening his work towards its consummation, that its plants may not all be destroyed. His watchcare is still lovingly assured to the laborers. For the aged ones who have served him long and faithfully he holds in his hand a sweet reward. To the ones who are now bearing the heavy labor and responsibility, he extends and reiterates his cheering promises; but to the youth he is beckoning and calling, and from among them he expects to find those who shall help to swell the numbers of his laborers until they shall become very great.

Deep in the hearts of his young people he recognizes the hidden springs of a powerful reserve force which at the pressure of his finger will be released and utilized. And like the silent, invisible forces of nature when placed under control and put into action, their strength shall be increased and multiplied many fold. God's hand is moving among them, and

there are those who will make themselves ready. He understands the latent powers and possibilities, and he knows that, abetted by his own will and strength, with his hand upon the lever, he may make of them a mighty, energizing force which shall be felt to the utmost parts of the vineyard.

Undoubtedly the years remaining are few in which this work is to be done, and clearer and stronger every day rings out the call for workers. The hour is pressing upon us when the call must be heeded, when the good branches remaining must be gathered out and planted, and the garden spot (his Zion) established, that the Master of the vineyard may be received. They are coming, and we believe they will continue to come in response to this call. Faintly at first they catch the sound. "It does not mean us," they say, hesitatingly, and with doubt. "It must mean others who are more ready and capable than we." But ever clearer, louder, as it rings out, the conviction comes, and by ones, by twos, and by dozens they begin to sense its meaning, even with gladness: "This call means me. The Master has found work for me in his vineyard! Let me make ready at once for my task."

It may require fortitude, it will require sacrifice, it *must* require faith to accept just the task the Master sets for each one; for it must be a whole-hearted service, unselfish, unspoiled by the thought of material compensation, and there will doubtless be those who will turn aside sadly, as did the young man long ago, and who shall say to themselves: "This

is not the task I would have sought. The Master is a hard one to require this of me. I will refuse to work in his vineyard, for he has not chosen as I would have chosen."

We have the hope that of such as these there will be few, and we have the confidence that there will be many who will be willing to abide by the Master's own choosing, and will be ready to sacrifice, to do and to endure; to accept each his own niche, whether it be at home or abroad, in college halls or at humble task, a place where others seeing can applaud, or one of obscurity and unnoticed. At every kind of task of brain and muscle they will be needed, and we trust that in every vocation there will be those prepared and willing to work out his designs. They have their decisions to make as others have made theirs; they have their battles to fight as older ones have fought before them; they have their temptations to meet as the youth in all ages have been tempted and tested; but who shall say they cannot, under his protection and in his strength, accomplish the divine purpose of the hour?

With an ear bent close to the vibrating, sobbing earth they are sensing the pathos, the hopelessness of that mourning call of stricken millions as it comes from wrecked homes and blood-stained battlefields. And as they bend listening to this plea for human sympathy and eternal hope, with the other ear lifted and attuned to receive the messages of the Infinite, they catch the clear, far-ringing, tender call of the Master of the vineyard, and arise with courage and

faith to respond. So shall they hear, and in heeding move forward with unselfish devotion and carry or help others to carry, to the anguished and broken-hearted ones of the nations this sweet, comforting, soul-stirring, hope-inspiring, life-giving message:

"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep,  
The wrong shall fail,  
The right prevail,  
With peace on earth good will to men."

Becoming thus laborers together with God in proclaiming this beautiful message of peace, there will come a daily compensation of unmeasured joy and satisfaction which more than requites for any sacrifice, or toil, or the relinquishing of worldly ambitions; and when the final pruning and nourishing is completed, they will realize as it is declared, "How blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard."





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